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MAIZE FLUNG ASIDE THE SWEEPING DRAPERY AND STEPPED FORTH, HER FACE GLOWING, HER SHINY EYES
GLANCING FROM ONE TO THE OTHER OF THE UTTERLY HORRIFIED COUNTENANCES BEFORE HER.

SISTER AGAINST SISTER; Or, THE RIVALRY OF HEARTS.

BY MRS. MARY REED CROWELL.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE GUEST.

Of all the many superb residences situated

along the coast of the ocean, between Cape May and the Highlands, there is no one more magnificent, imposing and substantial than the villa mansion known as "Silverdale," and the surrounding princely estate of thousands of acres, comprising the home farm, great reaches of glen forest and pasture land, glimmering lakelets, making a most charming and picturesque landscape. A wide, magnificent drive extends through the place, circling hither and thither,

affording most romantic views, and on both sides the drive, its entire length of sixteen miles, it was shaded by magnificent silver beeches, arching and twining together—the work of generations.

The gardens were in the highest state of cultivation, and the pineries, graperies, orchid house, forcing pits, were famous the country over. The parks were spacious, vast sheets of emerald splendor, with picturesque groups of trees, quaint summer-houses, rose arbors, green terraces, glimmering fountains, majestic statuary—every thing to please and educate and refine the senses.

The chief feature of the estate was, of course, the mansion, a vast, imposing dwelling, standing upon a gentle eminence toward the part of the park overlooking the ocean, and presenting a combination of towers, turrets, immense oriel windows and balconies, that bespoke its solidness and security, its suitableness for the winter residence as well as summer abode of its owner, as it was, for Silverdale had been, and was the one beloved home spot since it had been built: one portion when Royal Florimel was in his prime, the other portion when Royal Florimel's granddaughter was a baby in arms.

Both Royal Florimel, "young Royal," his son, and his kin were dead, when the events about to be chronicled transpired, and the little granddaughter who had been in her nurse's arms, with a black sash around her baby waist in mourning for the sudden, untimely death of both her parents, who were drowned while out yachting when the little one was but a few months old—this little heiress, now grown to maidenhood, was the only and last representative of the proud old line of Florimel.

A very queen in her beautiful home—sweet, loving, imperious and generous, surely no queen was so well beloved as beautiful Maize Florimel, whose guardian visited none of his authority upon her, and who contented himself with officially calling upon her every three months. Idolized by the servants, most of whom had served the family all of Maize's life, the young girl did not have a care, and never having known the love of father and mother, sister or brother, she did not grieve for it, and lived her life happy as the birds among the trees.

It was one glorious afternoon in mid September, not half a dozen years ago, when the tide of fashion was about beginning to set city-ward from the caravanseries all along the Atlantic coast, that a young gentleman, in every way resembling "the young gentleman of the period" in dress, manner and style, stepped into a carriage at the door of the St. Grace's Hotel—the most fashionable of all the fashionable summer resorts in that fashionable watering-place—and gave the coachman the order: "To Silverdale," and then leaned back against the cushions, gazing out upon the sea, as the carriage bowled along, with a slowly hardening look on his handsome face, that betrayed, with every thought, the sinister look in his dark eyes, the half sneer on his sensual lips, that changed into a smile of gleaming envy as, at last, the carriage drove in the ever-hospitably open gates of Silverdale, where, by the gracious young proprietress's kindness, the public were allowed to

drive through and enjoy the beauties so world-renowned.

"It is a glorious inheritance!" he thought, his dark eyes kindling greedily. "It's fair owner need not envy a queen on her throne; it is indeed a royal prize, worthy my best—and my worst—efforts! It is to be war between us, my unknown Miss Florimel—war to the knife-hilt! There is a struggle to the death before you and me; I wonder which shall win?"

And by the look of deadly resolve on his face it was evident that, whatever the struggle he meant, he would certainly not allow himself to be worsted by any sense of chivalry or honor.

To the driver's amazement, he was ordered not to proceed in the usual way, according to the route prescribed for visitors, but directed to drive directly to the house, where the stranger alighted at the grand entrance, and rung an imperious summons, which was promptly answered by the porter, who requested his business.

"I wish to see Miss Florimel. Be good enough to tell her that a gentleman from New York wishes to see her a moment, on business."

He was at once conducted to a spacious, splendid room at the further end of the long corridor, where he was requested to await while the message was given, and to which place, several minutes later, a servant returned, saying that his mistress would see him presently.

Left to himself, he took a minute survey of his luxurious surroundings, admiring with gleaming, greedy eyes the display of taste and elegance both within and without, hardly noting how long he was kept waiting, until, glancing at a tiny, gilded clock on a bracket he saw he had been there nearly half an hour. A frown of annoyance and indignation that was gathering on his face was cleared by the sound of boot heels clicking on the tiled flooring of the main hall. Then he heard the swift rush of trailing garments, and a young girl entered the room, before whom, in involuntary admiration he arose and bowed lowly.

It was an exquisite revelation of girlish loveliness and haughty grace and dignity upon which he looked—a young girl, not yet twenty, slender, graceful, with wide, well-opened, luminous brown eyes, shaded by still darker lashes, a complexion fair as a lily leaf, with pale, delicious pink warmth in the round cheeks; a mouth small, scarlet, willful, tender, sweet—an entrancing, bewitching mouth, perfect either in repose or action; masses of darkly brown hair, all rippled and waved in the latest fashion on her queenly little head; and the whole perfect picture completed by a dress of airy tissue of a dull golden shade—a perfect picture of bright, piquant, sunny girlhood.

"You wished to see me, sir?" she asked, in a clear, sweet voice, as she looked doubtfully at him. "Because the servant gave no name, I supposed it was a neighbor."

"Then you are Miss Maize Florimel?"

The young girl bowed, gravely.

"You will pardon me if I decline to give you my name at this moment, Miss Florimel. With your permission I will retain it until I have made known my errand. I have come from

New York, and bring with me letters from friends of yours which I will present presently. Am I to believe you will grant me the attention I request?"

Maize hesitated in her answer, the stranger's words and manner impressing her unpleasantly, but, the second of hesitation assured her that disagreeable as this strange young man's presence was to her, peculiar as his speech and manner were, she was in a position to rid herself of all, by merely raising her voice.

So, with a haughty little bend of her head she coldly signified her assent to the singular proposition, pointing to a chair for her guest's acceptance, while she quietly seated herself in a low, easy one beside the open window.

With an admiring glance about him, the young man seated himself, first wheeling the chair somewhat nearer the young girl's.

"Silverdale is a magnificent place. No doubt you love it as your life, Miss Florimel."

With haughty surprise she answered him coldly:

"I am unable to understand what my sentiments in regard to my home have to do with your important business, sir."

A curious little gleam came into his eyes, and if Maize could have seen beneath his bushy mustache, she would have also seen a strange smile on his cruel mouth.

"It has much—in fact everything, to do with it," he responded, quickly. "My business here is to tell you that your heretofore undisturbed possession of this charming and cherished place is threatened—"

"Threatened!"

"Yes, Miss Florimel. There is another claimant to Silverdale!"

Maize uttered an exclamation of half-indignant, half-amused incredulity.

"You have been imposed upon, sir. Your statement is absolutely incorrect. I am the only child of my deceased parents, the only grandchild of my late grandfather, consequently I am the sole, undisputed heiress of the Florimel estates."

He smiled again—and there was an impression of great strength conveyed by the smile that struck a vague chill to the young girl's very soul.

"I am not speaking in uncertainty. The new claimant has a superior right to your own, Miss Florimel," he said, with the most positive assurance in his tones. "If you will permit me, I will tell you—"

Maize interrupted him with an imperious wave of her hand.

"I decline to hear your statement," she said.

"However preposterous your words are, if you are desirous of stating them, I am not the one to whom they should be told. I refer you to my guardian, Mr. Asher Lyman, whom you will find in New York. He and his lawyer will soon dispose of the pretensions you prefer."

As she spoke, she arose, bowing slightly, as if to withdraw. With a sudden lurid blaze flashing in his eyes, the stranger reached out his arm, impetuously, yet commandingly.

"Stay!" he exclaimed. "I have come to tell you the whole story before it shall come to you as the gossip of the whole country. before the

newspapers shall blazon it to the world! You can at least listen to me, and if you regard the evidence as insufficient, well and good. If you find it overwhelming, convincing, possibly you and the rival claimant may be able to effect a compromise without going to law. I beg of you, for your own sake, Miss Florimel, to listen to me. If you refuse, to-morrow every New York daily shall publish it for you to read!"

His vehement, positive words had their effect.

Maize resumed her seat, her haughty, lovely face a shade paler.

"I know your story is a manufactured one—your new claim a forged one. Yet I will listen to you. Be brief as possible."

He bowed.

"I will be so. It is a well-known fact that when Royal Florimel, your grandfather, died, he left but one child, his son, Royal, to whom he left all his property, without reserve, and through whom you inherit. It is also a supposed fact, that when your father met his death, you, his infant daughter, were sole heiress to all the Florimel property. But it was not so. Royal Florimel, your father, had sown a full harvest of wild oats before his marriage to your mother, and among his many deeds was a secret marriage to a young actress, who was the rage in London—a young widow, charming and beautiful, with whom he lived less than a six-month, bitterly repenting his folly, and, at the end of a year, deserted her. Six months after that, she died, leaving her new-born babe to fight its way in the world; while knowing his wife was dead, not knowing of his daughter's birth, your father came home, settled down and married your mother—his secret his own. And, Miss Florimel, that daughter, your elder half-sister, the legitimate heiress of Silverdale, is alive to-day."

Maize looked at him, with dilating eyes. She did not speak, for she could not trust her voice.

"The certificate of that marriage is in existence. There are living witnesses to it. There is a registry in the Vital Statistics records of the child's birth. There are letters Royal Florimel wrote to his first wife, a conclusive chain of evidence, in which not one link is missing, and Royal Florimel's true heiress is about to enter a claim for her inheritance."

"And why never before?" the young girl's voice suddenly rung out. "Why was the existence of this daughter—this pretended daughter—never made known to my grandfather, to my father? Why has she waited until now?"

"Because, until a month ago, she was in ignorance of her own history; because it was only by merest accident she learned the truth, which she means shall be closely investigated. Although she has been harshly treated, she has no wish to war with you, but her mother's wrongs *must* be righted, justice *must* be done. She demands her rightful name and honor, and she now is resolved to seek redress by law. I have come to you, Miss Florimel, before proceeding to extremities, to ask what shall be done? Compromise, or war to the death? I bring you papers to prove the claim, and I

bring you a letter from Mr. Lacy Floyd, your relative, your father's cousin, who was his confidant all through—a letter which declares he was a witness to the first marriage; that he knows the new claimant to be the true heiress, also giving his reasons for his silence so long. Again I ask, shall it be war or compromise between us?"

He rose from his chair, standing before her with folded arms, his countenance set, stern, pale.

Maize arose, too, a sudden agitation making her shiver like a leaf.

"But, who—are you?" she whispered. "Not a lawyer? not—"

"No, not a lawyer, but one deeply, personally interested and who will never give up the fight. I am Claude Noel, and it was my mother your father married, then threw aside, and, child of four years old that I was, I remember her grief. It is my half-sister, as well as yours, who inherits Silverdale and its appurtenances, and I need not assure you I shall guard her interests well, for my own sake as well as hers. Miss Florimel, shall we be friends or enemies?"

And as he awaited her answer, he looked at her with the air of a man who held her destiny in his relentless hands.

CHAPTER II.

AN HOUR'S INVESTIGATION.

THE announcement made by Claude Noel, at first almost stupefied Maize.

"It is impossible!" she exclaimed. "It is insulting! My father left no family besides myself; my father was never married but to my mother. The story is outrageous, incredible!"

Noel's handsome, olive face flushed.

"Do you mean to accuse my sister and me of being impostors?" he demanded.

"I have formed no opinion whatever," she returned, haughtily. "But I do think it strange you should presume to come to me, instead of going to Mr. Lyman."

"Then you would rather have heard it from him? I fancied you would prefer to personally examine our claims and proofs, then submit your decision to your guardian, for it is my desire to effect a compromise. We do not wish or mean, to rob you of your riches, but rather to share it with you."

Maize's dark eyes flashed and her lips curled in a little contemptuous sneer.

"How very kind you are in your modest demands! I would advise you to delay your desire for 'compromise' until you have proved yourself the heir—or rather the half-brother to the the alleged half-sister of mine. So far as your wonderful proofs go—I will look into them."

Noel smiled, and first produced from a packet of documents, the photograph of a young girl, several years older than Maize, with an undeniably handsome, well-bred face, that, beyond question, bore a most striking resemblance to Maize Florimel's father—having the same luxuriant, fair hair, haughty blue eyes, that had not been inherited by Maize, who was her beautiful young mother, dark and brilliant, over again, receiving from her father his tricks of speech and bearing, his haughty spiritedness and aristocratic imperiousness.

Undeniably the photograph strongly, positively resembled the portraits of the line of Royal Florimels, who were wonderfully like to each other, and a painful conviction pressed itself upon Maize, as she gazed, that the smiling, proud-faced girl was what she claimed to be—a Florimel!

"A resemblance—and the picture certainly resembles the Florimels—proves nothing," she said, coldly. "I require far stronger proofs."

"You shall have them. Perhaps added to other evidence the family resemblance will prove a great deal. Here is a letter from your relative, Mr. Lacy Floyd. I should have presented it at first, perhaps, but I desired to break the news gradually. What Mr. Floyd says will weigh with you, I fancy."

"Mr. Floyd is one of my dearest, most faithful friends," Maize returned. "He was papa's friend, trusted and true. You say Mr. Floyd recognizes your claim?" she added, in sudden remembrance.

For answer Mr. Noel handed her the letter—a long, closely written letter, in which Mr. Lacy Floyd specifically and in detail repeated the same statements Noel had made, giving precise dates, entering into closest minutiae, and explaining why he had kept his secret so long—that his friend, Maize's father, had entrusted his confidence, to which he had been true until, the true heiress having learned of her birth and rights, by merest accident, and her half-brother coming forward to prosecute her claim, he could no longer keep the secret. He stated that Claude Noel had had an interview with him, and upon his advice, had gone to Silverdale, where he advised Maize to invite him to remain for a day or so, until himself and Mr. Asher Lyman, who had been notified, could join them. He cautioned her to be wise, and prudent, and to do nothing rashly.

While reading the letter, a great change had come over Maize's sweet young face, and as she lifted her glowing, startled eyes to Noel, as she finished, he was struck with its grave paleness—for Mr. Lacy Floyd's confirmation was a shock almost too heavy for her to endure.

"What other proofs have you?" she asked, presently, her voice tremulous, even while she forced herself into bravely meeting all the fire of the enemy.

In that same impressive silence, Noel laid before her the marriage certificate of Royal Florimel and Gracieuse Noel, a copy of the registry of the birth of Sylvia, daughter of Royal and Gracieuse Florimel.

Maize looked at them carefully.

"They may or may not be genuine," she said, coldly. "I will leave the proof to Mr. Lyman."

Noel flushed again.

"It is well to be cautious," he returned. "An estate like Silverdale is not to be relinquished without resistance—which will, however, be useless."

Other documents were shown her, which she patiently read.

"It looks plain enough," she said, finally, "but I am in no degree convinced of the merits and justice of the case. I admit you have made out a strong case, but I leave it to older and

wiser heads than mine to consider. Either your half-sister, Miss Sylvia, is owner here, or I am. When I am convinced of the justice of your case, I will resign every thing to her. Until that improbable time—"

He interrupted her with a deprecatory gesture.

"But we would not consent to despoil you, Miss Florimel. Can there be no compromise arranged?"

Maize arose as she answered:

"Let us defer further discussion until tomorrow when Mr. Lyman and my cousin, Lacy, will be here. Will you remain as the guest of the house until that time?"

He accepted the invitation as gravely as it was given.

"Thanks; I will remain."

Maize instantly summoned a servant, to whom she gave the order to have a guest-room prepared for the accommodation of the gentleman who would remain a day or so.

"I am aware I must certainly appear in a most obtrusive light to you, my dear Miss Florimel," Noel said, as the servant withdrew.

"I know how much you have at stake—"

"No, you do not; you can not know!" she interrupted, passionately. "It is not only that my home is the most beautiful place in the world to me, that the servants are like dear old friends, but there are a thousand associations, cherished hopes and plans of which no stranger could dream—"

She paused, brokenly, then walked up and down, with impulsive, nervous steps.

Noel's eyes followed her, keen admiration in their gaze.

"My dear Miss Florimel, all this misery and trouble need never be suffered. I have told you, and I repeat it, unless you decline our overtures, a compromise may be effected by which your plans may still go on, your hopes be not blasted, just the same—"

She held up a silencing hand, and continued her quick, restless promenade, not so much as glancing at him. Had she seen the expression of his dark, handsome face, it would certainly have given her no narrow hint of the nature of the "compromise" he had several times mentioned, for her rare glowing beauty, her sweet spirited bearing, her pure, dainty girlishness had already made an impression upon him, and, an hour from the time he had first seen Maize Florimel, he was resolved to win her for his bride—a grand compromise indeed.

But for his caution and prudence he would have yielded to the strong temptation to open his thoughts to her.

"It will come of itself in due time," he said to himself, a thrill of joy quivering through him as he looked at her lovely drooping head. "It will have to come! She will never consent to be turned out, when, as my wife she may remain in undisturbed rule. It will be a master-stroke of policy on my part, and Sylvia's share in the glories will not diminish mine."

A few minutes later a servant appeared to conduct Mr. Noel to his room, and, left alone, Maize withdrew to her room, where, locking herself in, she sunk down on the floor beside an easy-chair, the tears, so nobly restrained, rush-

ing to her bonny brown eyes, her slender figure convulsed with awful despair.

"I am afraid it is too true!" she wailed, pitiously. "A half-sister—papa's other child—the true heir, and I—I a usurper! And penniless if it is true! And I have been so thankful for my riches because I could help Wilton, enrich him, and buy back his dear old home for him! And now I am poor as he is, unable to be of any benefit to him, and we can never marry!"

With a sudden little burst of sobs, she sprung to her feet, dashing the tears impetuously away.

"But I will fight the claim until fighting is useless! I will not gently accept ruin and desolation—mine and Wilton's! And I was so happy just now—the world was all so bright now, that I was certain Wilton loved me!"

And another fresh gush of tears, another storm of convulsive dismay, shook her like a cruel tempest tosses some fragile flower.

CHAPTER III.

ONE PERFECT HOUR.

WHEN Maize appeared in the parlor again, a half-hour before dinner-time, she found already there, as she had expected to find, her friend and companion, Mrs. Weston, who had been resident governess at Silverdale until promoted to the position at present occupied.

She was a refined, lovely lady, somewhat past middle age, with silvery hair, rich and luxuriant, brushed off her fair, pale face, and with eyes always placid and sweet, a low, gentle voice and perfect manner—a friend in whom the young mistress of Silverdale trusted implicitly—a trust that had never been betrayed.

Now, in her black satin dress, with creamy laces at neck and wrists, tiny solitaires in her ears, Mrs. Weston made a charming picture as she sat on the balcony just outside the parlor window, looking out on the sea shimmering and shining on the other side of the avenue, thronged with a gay, fashionable crowd promenading and driving.

As Maize's light footsteps sounded beside her, Mrs. Weston looked around, with a sunny smile that instantly faded at sight of the wistful look in the young girl's face, the brooding sorrow in the sunny brown eyes.

"My dear, what has happened to you?" she asked, hastily.

Maize's mouth quivered, and she looked drearily out on the brilliant scene.

"I have come to tell you. Something *has* happened, Mrs. Weston—the strangest, strangest thing. We have a guest who arrived two hours ago, and I expect him to appear every moment, now."

"A guest, Maize? A gentleman?"

"Yes, a gentleman, a stranger. His name is Claude Noel," and then, with quivering mouth and shining eyes, Maize related the entire extraordinary statement, Mrs. Weston listening, shocked and startled.

"I will not believe in the man's claims!" she said, with an impetuosity rare for her. "He is an impostor—of course he is! It would be folly to doubt Mr. Floyd's words, but the letter purporting to be from him may have been forged!"

I am glad he and Mr. Lyman will be here tomorrow."

While they were speaking, Mr. Claude Noel entered the parlor, and Maize presented him to Mrs. Weston, who, in the hour that she was with him, until after dinner, discovered his ardent admiration for the young girl.

"And now, if you will be good enough to excuse me, I will take a twilight stroll through the garden," he said, dinner being over. "I ask no greater pleasure than to begin my acquaintance with my future home, my sister's future possessions. Silverdale is a princely heritage, and its heirs the most favored of mortals."

He withdrew with an elaborate bow, lighted a cigar just outside the door, and walked leisurely away, followed by two pair of grave, troubled eyes.

"He has neither delicacy nor breeding," Mrs. Weston remarked, bitterly. "His open exultation, just now, showed all his coarseness and smallness. I dislike him excessively."

"And I feel, when he watches me, as though there were a toad or a snake near me. I feel almost afraid of him," Maize returned, with a shudder. "I cannot speak of him without a shiver of loathing. Let us go for a drive, Mrs. Weston—let us go to Grandcourt. I must see Wilton and tell him all about it."

"My dear, I am afraid—"

"It would not be quite proper," I know what you mean, dear Mrs. Weston, but, I must go! I cannot rest with this burden on my mind. Yes, I know I could send for him to come here, but I do not want him to meet this man. We will go?"

And as Mrs. Weston never had refused a request of Maize's, in her life, it came to pass that twenty minutes later, both ladies were riding along in an open barouche toward "Grandcourt."

It was quite a drive from Silverdale, almost straight in from the sea, a large, old-fashioned place, quaint and picturesque, past which the tide of life and fashion flowed, never disturbing or leaving even an impression—a homestead where generations had been born, lived and died, never famous for wealth, but known wherever their name was heard for their culture, their charity, their nobility of character.

Of all the Grandcourts who had been the head of the Grandcourt family, the present kin and occupant was Wilton Grandcourt, Maize Florimel's lover—not formally accepted lover—but whom she knew loved her, and whose pride alone forbade him to speak.

It was just dusk of the long late summer day when the two ladies from Silverdale were shown into the parlor at Grandcourt, and before the servant had left the room to announce them to his master, Wilton Grandcourt himself came through the hall, with quick, ringing tread, at sound of which Maize arose, her face all aglow, her eyes all alight, as he entered, greeting his guests warmly.

He was a grand-looking young fellow, tall and straight, with noble features indicative of mental and moral strength, refinement and manliness.

His face was handsome, with a firm, pleasant mouth, and keen, bright eyes that softened into tenderness as he looked at Maize.

Almost at once Maize plunged into the object of her venturing to Grandcourt, telling Mr. Grandcourt as she had told Mrs. Weston the strange experience of the day, and frankly asking his advice and counsel.

As Maize herself and as Mrs. Weston had been, Mr. Grandcourt was shocked and horrified, asserting the impossibility of the case, and finally subsiding into grave perplexity when he learned of the letter Mr. Lacy Floyd had written; and deciding, as both ladies had done, that the remarkable matter was safe in the hands of such friends and business men as Mr. Lyman and Mr. Floyd.

As they sat side by side, deeply engrossed in discussing the affair, Mrs. Weston had quietly risen and left them, going across the hall to the library, which Mr. Grandcourt had left upon his guests' arrival, and where the lamp burned mellowly and invitingly.

Left alone, the young people naturally drifted into personalities on the subject, and Maize freely and frankly expressed to him the dreadful sacrifice she felt it must be to give her home, her expectations up; but telling him that, if go she must, she would do it bravely.

While she was speaking, Mr. Grandcourt had left his seat beside her and walked several times up and down the room, his face pale and thoughtful, and then, suddenly, he paused in front of her.

"Maize! Look up at me!"

His voice trembled as he spoke, and she lifted her drooping head to meet a glance from his splendid eyes, to see an expression on his face that thrilled her to her very soul.

"I have something to say to you, Maize," he went on. "I have kept silent until now, because you were rich and I poor. But now, when you are threatened with poverty equal to mine, I may speak; I may tell you, Maize, my darling, that I love you, that I love you! Let this threatened trouble drive you to me, darling! Let me be your protector, your husband, Maize, will you? Will you give yourself to me, dear? Will you come to Grandcourt, my blessed wife, when you leave Silverdale—if you leave it?"

His impassioned tones, eager, impetuous, sent a flood of happiness over the bonny face that had again drooped beneath the fire in his eyes.

"Speak to me, dearest," he pleaded. "Can you love me—do you love me?"

And as she shyly lifted her exquisite flushed face for one swift glance, he read in it all he wanted to read, and the next instant he was beside her, her hand in his, her dusky little head on his shoulder, his arm around her slender waist.

And then, a second afterward, she started up, all blushes and confusion.

"Will! Don't kiss me again!" she whispered. "You must not—"

But another caress stolen off her sweet mouth interrupted her reproof.

"Do not be so aggravating, then, darling! Remember, the next time I see you may be in the presence of others, and I know perfectly well how stately and cold you can be, for all the warm, true heart under all. I am inclined to make the most of my new privileges, little

one—you surely do not think I would do otherwise?"

He had allowed her to slip from his embrace, and now she turned a flushed yet grave face toward him.

"I am not sure I am doing right in promising to marry you, Wilton," she said. "You ought to have a rich wife—"

"And so I shall!" he interrupted. "A bonny bride rich in goodness, sweetness and beauty. It is you who will be doing yourself an injustice, Maize, but I am too selfish, too happy, to be generous and give you up. We will be poor, but never uncomfortable, darling, and with you as the mistress of my house I can succeed in anything I undertake. I have large faith in myself, you see."

"So have I," she returned, with a smile of adoration. "But I may not come utterly penniless, Wilton. Mr. Noel speaks of a compromise; they may mean to settle an income upon me, or to give me a share. But there is one thing, Wilton, I have by no means made up my mind that the new claim is just, or that I will have to give up any thing. And if the man and his half-sister are impostors, and I am still undisputed heiress of Silverdale, I will never release you from your engagement to me. Mind!"

"And brand me a fortune-hunter? My darling, my love, I would not give you up for all the world, for ten thousand worlds! Silverdale or no Silverdale, impostors or no impostors, you are mine, my very own, forever, from this blessed evening. And to-morrow when your guardian is at Silverdale, I shall drive over, for I have something to say to him, and you may imagine what it is!"

Just then Mrs. Weston came leisurely toward them, and then, shortly afterward, they went home, all the clouds that had lowered over Maize's head seeming lifted, all her life reaching out bright and beautiful before her.

"It is worth the loss of everything else in the world to know I possess his love," she said, rapturously, to herself, as she leaned quietly back in the carriage, looking up into the starry sky.

CHAPTER IV.

CLAUDE NOEL'S COMPROMISE.

THE following morning saw the arrival at Silverdale, by agreement, of Maize's guardian, Mr. Asher Lyman, an elderly gentleman, stern, honest, truthful, uncompromising to a fault, a man whose honor and judgment were to be relied upon implicitly, and her relative, Mr. Lacy Floyd, a small, insignificant-looking personage, with quiet movements, an amiable temperament, gentle and mild in speech, who was ardently attached to his charming young cousin, and who had never failed to serve her best interests.

Maize welcomed the gentlemen gladly, was presented to Mr. Braddon, the lawyer whom her guardian had brought with him, and, in turn, presented to Mr. Lyman the new claimant to the estate, whom Mr. Floyd had already greeted.

Mrs. Weston seated herself at a distant win-

dow, Noel somewhat apart from the group at the library table, Maize drawing her chair closely beside it, and then opening the ponderous-looking document, tied in red tape, which Claude Noel had deposited upon the table.

Mr. Floyd made a little preliminary speech, stating that the question before them was to decide upon the legality or illegality of the claim before them.

Then began a long, close study of the various papers by Mr. Lyman, Mr. Braddon and Mr. Floyd, while Maize looked on in grave silence, and Claude Noel watched the gentlemen and the young girl with furtive, equal impartiality, the calmness of assured triumph in his quiet demeanor.

The weary examination of the papers over, Mr. Braddon dashed them down, and turned to Noel.

"The documents appear to be genuine, and, if genuine, they put the most serious aspect upon the business. I wish to ask you some questions, Mr. Noel, which I presume you can answer."

For half an hour or more, a perfect storm of questions followed, Noel answering promptly, correctly, convincingly.

"And now I will question you, Mr. Floyd," the lawyer went on, as he dismissed Noel from further speech.

"Oblige us by telling us all you know concerning this new claimant to Silverdale."

So, gravely, anxiously, Mr. Floyd related his unfortunate knowledge of the unfortunate affair, assuring them of the great grief it was to him to be the means of visiting such a terrible trial upon the young girl he loved as a daughter.

Thoughtful and perplexed, Mr. Lyman and Mr. Braddon listened to the long story.

"It looks clear as daylight," the lawyer said, as Mr. Floyd ended. "All there is to do is to examine the originals of which these papers are copies, and see this Miss Sylvia Florimel as soon as the state of her health will permit. You say she is an invalid—a helpless invalid?" he asked of Noel.

"She never leaves her room, sir, or she would have accompanied me, in place of giving me power of attorney."

"And then," Mr. Lyman said, slowly, "we will decide whether or not we go to law."

Maize arose from her chair, her face pale and resolute.

"We will decide that here and now, gentlemen," she said, her voice ringing out clear and sweet and positive.

"If you all agree to the justice of this new claim, if he is right in his demands, why should time and money be wasted in resisting him? Why should a scandal be created? Right is right, and if the property is not my own I do not want it. Make all the investigations you think best, but remember that if you, who desire my triumph, are already convinced of the merit of this person's claim, the same evidence will also convince strangers."

Her lovely brown eyes were flashing like diamonds as she spoke.

"She is right," Mr. Lyman said, gravely.

"Decidedly prudent and clear-headed, as she

always is," Mr. Floyd added admiringly yet gravely. "The investigation proposed will but add to our conviction, and although I am deeply grieved for our poor little Maize, I am sure Mr. Noel means to—"

Noel interrupted him, stepping forward.

"Permit me to speak for myself," he said, bowing toward Maize. "I am perfectly aware what it must cost Miss Florimel to relinquish what she has always valued and cherished as her own, and rather than be the means of making her suffer the loss of her heritage, I offer here and now a compromise."

"A compromise!" Mr. Lyman exclaimed, in surprise.

"A compromise! Ah!" Mr. Braddon echoed the words in interested attention.

"Yes," Noel replied, a slight embarrassment in his manner. "I have no wild idea of splitting the property—that would be most impossible and undesirable. What I have to say may seem altogether unprecedented, and I fear it should be said privately to Miss Florimel, but, as I stand alone among her friends, myself regarded an enemy, I cannot be too honest-spoken, Miss Florimel!"

He turned toward her as he spoke her name, and she looked wonderingly at him.

"Miss Florimel," he went on, "you comprehend that we have made good our claim to the property; that, a few formalities gone through, we take possession. It goes to my heart to realize how you must be deposed, be hurled from princely wealth to comparative poverty. I have known you but a few hours, but I know you to be good and noble and spirited as you are charming and beautiful. Miss Florimel, I ask you to give my sister a home here, and I ask you to remain the mistress of Silverdale as my wife. Miss Florimel, will you marry me?"

His words created the most profound sensation; every eye turned upon Maize, whose proud young face flushed, then grew white as marble, as she slowly arose from her chair, and looked at the stranger-claimant, a faint quiver on her lips, a look of clear, resolute light shining in her brown eyes.

"Mr. Claude Noel," she said, "I have to thank you for the honor you offer me, but I decline it. I am not capable of marrying for a home, and if I were, I would not be your wife."

"Maize!" Mr. Lyman said, sternly.

"Well? And what is it you mean? Do you want me to marry a man I had never seen until yesterday?"

She turned proudly toward her guardian as she spoke.

"But do not be so hasty in your decision," he answered. "Mr. Noel has shown a generosity and kindness that demands you take time for consideration."

Mr. Braddon stroked his long gray whiskers reflectively.

"A marriage would be a handsome settlement of the case, Miss Florimel," he ventured, respectfully.

"I fear I have been too abrupt—pray take time—your own time for consideration, my dear Miss Florimel." Noel came a step nearer Maize as he spoke.

"I need no time; not a moment," she answered, impetuously. "A year—ten years—hence my answer would be as it is now."

In a gentle, fatherly way Mr. Floyd reasoned with her, picturing her future if she left her home. In a grave, brief argument Mr. Lyman placed the case before her, but in vain, telling her he was not in a position to do anything for her, much as he would wish to do so.

"I will not be dependent on your charity," Maize flashed. "I am young and strong, and I shall never starve."

"No, Maize will not come to want, even though she persist in her obstinacy and deliberately put herself out of house and home," Mr. Floyd said, with grave kindness. "I will take her with me, and I am sure she will not refuse the offer of a kinsman's home."

Noel came forward again.

"Will not Miss Florimel take time for reflection? Or am I to consider myself rejected?"

Maize's haughty dark head went up in cold pride.

"You have my answer. You have little manly pride to persist in your proposals after my unqualified refusal."

His face flushed, and there came a strange gleam in his eyes as they met hers.

"Very well, Miss Florimel. It must be so, then, and the gist of the unqualified refusal is, I presume, the fact that you have already bestowed your affections upon the handsome beggar called Wilton Grandcourt?"

A lightning blaze flashed from the bright brown eyes.

"And if so, sir, what then?"

Mr. Floyd uttered an exclamation of horrified surprise.

"My dear girl! You do not mean—"

"She does not mean that she wishes her name associated with that of young Grandcourt. Miss Florimel has the proper pride of a young lady, Mr. Floyd, and no young lady would wish the world to suppose she was interested in a young man known to be not a marrying man."

Mr. Lyman's words dropped like little hail-drops, and waiting with ominous patience until he was done speaking, Maize stood with proud, upreared head.

"Be careful how you speak of Mr. Wilton Grandcourt in my presence, Mr. Lyman!" she said, warmly. "He is my betrothed husband."

Noel uttered an incredulous, amazed exclamation, and Mr. Floyd turned absolutely livid.

"Maize! Maize! You do not mean to tell us you are engaged—engaged—to that poverty-ridden man?"

Her face quivered, for the signs of his grief hurt her, stanch though she was to her lover.

"We will not continue this interview further," she said, after a moment. "I have said my say, and all I ask is to be left at Silverdale in undisturbed possession while the investigations are being made. Give me a fortnight to myself, then come to me with the results of your task. If your present opinions are confirmed, I will then without delay leave the place with my personal effects."

"Miss Florimel's request is just," Noel said. "I will leave Silverdale at once, and two weeks from to-day I will be here to make final arrangements."

So the momentous interview ended.

Claude Noel at once took his leave, watched by Mr. Lyman and Mr. Floyd, as he walked briskly down to the carriage in waiting.

"A handsome fellow," Mr. Lyman remarked, approvingly.

"Yes, and a fine fellow. What a pity Maize will not accept him."

"She will accept him—she must accept him!" Mr. Lyman declared, resolutely. "She must not be allowed to throw away her whole future for a mere childish caprice. Why, that fellow Grandcourt is not only poor as a church mouse, but is over head and ears in debt; it is well understood he can't marry, for what has he to support a wife on? Maize must be made to see it. She *must* marry this Noel."

"Yes," repeated Lacy Floyd, softly, "Maize must be made to marry him."

And it suddenly occurred to Mr. Lyman, by some strange intuition, that under all Lacy Floyd's mild gentleness was an indomitable will that was almost fierce in its tigerish strength.

CHAPTER V.

FATED TO BE.

THE guardian of the young mistress of Silverdale, after the departure of Claude Noel and Mr. Braddon, remained together several hours in close conversation, both of them equally convinced of the justice of the new claim, equally united in considering Maize's engagement to Wilton Grandcourt a folly, from the consummation of which she must be rescued at whatever cost, and equally agreed that her marriage to Claude Noel was so desirable that they resolved to use not only their influence but their authority toward furthering the alliance.

Every moment of their stay Maize had been looking for Mr. Grandcourt's appearance, according to his expectation, but it was a decided relief to her that he did not come, detained unavoidably as she had full faith to believe, and knowing, as she had not known before, the hostility her guardians felt toward him.

The two gentlemen remained to luncheon, and shortly afterward departed, assuring Maize she should be left in undisturbed peace during the coming two weeks, and begging her to give serious reflection to the proposal Mr. Noel had made, despite her ultimatum.

Gravely, yet with willful imperiousness, Maize had assured them she should never give the obnoxious subject the benefit of one minute's thought, and then the gentlemen went away, and the momentous two weeks began, the days drifting not unpleasantly by, for with all the young girl's heavy load of care and anxiety, each day brought its blessed share of sweetness and joy in the visits of her lover.

But even those two weeks could not last forever, and one cool crisp day, almost at the very close of September, brought the appointed time when Claude Noel should depose her, or be forever silenced.

It was one of earth's most glorious days, mellow and perfect, and Maize had thrown open every window and door to the glad sunshine

and salty sea breeze—making the house wear a gala appearance which should not betray to the rival claimant when he came the deathly sacrifice its fair young mistress would pay if she must leave it.

She had dressed herself in almost splendor, as if for a grand triumph, and she looked like some blue-blooded young duchess in her trained princess dress of black velvet, that seemed molded to her slender, rounded figure, with a superb diamond cross flashing on her bosom, solitaires in her tiny, close-set ears and on her white wrists. Her lovely, shining hair was piled high on her haughty little head, and a slender, golden dagger with a diamond-set hilt held the massive, dusky coil in place, below which, on her white forehead, was a charming little half-waving fringe.

She had gone down into the parlors alone, just before the expected arrival of the train that was to bring her guests, and while there, looking with grave, resolute eyes on the dancing sea, she heard the sounds of arrival, and in a moment Lacy Floyd entered the room alone, coming affectionately forward and kissing her tenderly.

"My poor little dear," he said. "I expected to find you broken down and utterly dismayed, but you look like a young queen—a young lioness, almost. It cannot be possible you are expecting to come off victorious?"

A sudden glow rushed to her cheeks.

"I mean that Mr. Claude Noel shall never know what his victory costs me," she returned, steadfastly. "These diamonds are not the Florimel diamonds, they were my mother's, and no one can take them from me; I have a right to wear them at the most crushing defeat. Is Mr. Lyman here, Lacy?"

"We are all here, Maize, and I came in advance to tell you to prepare for the worst. The evidence is so plain that it will be folly to go to law, but it is to be as you decide. Remember, my dear, that, if it comes to leaving Silverdale, my heart and home, humble though they be, are open to you. Come, my dear, we will go to the library."

He gave her his arm and escorted her to the library, where she was warmly greeted by Mr. Lyman, who looked grave and troubled, and by Mr. Braddon who was also sorrowful and thoughtful in manner, while Claude Noel came forward with an exultant smile, bearing himself with the air of a host—as indeed he felt himself to be.

"I am most delighted to see you again, my dear Miss Florimel," he said lightly. "Your care has touched you very gently."

He extended his hand, but a look of aversion in the bright brown eyes that accompanied the mere touch of her fingers she granted him, told him how hopeless his suit was regarded.

"I have a little surprise for you," Noel went on, hiding well his chagrin at his reception. "Under the advice and by the assistance of her physicians, I have had my sister, Miss Sylvia Florimel, conveyed to Silverdale. She will be most pleased to be presented. Sylvia, my dear, this is Miss Maize, your younger sister; Miss Maize Florimel, Miss Sylvia Florimel, the heiress of Silverdale."

In amazement, Maize turned toward the sofa, a little in the background, and saw the young lady, the original of the photograph Noel had shown her. She was dressed fashionably and elegantly, and only from the circumstance of the affghan covering her from her waist as she sat there, was Maize reminded of her incurable invalidism, her hopeless lameness.

As Noel spoke, Sylvia extended her hand, a little gleam of exultation in her bright eyes.

"You will shake hands, I am sure? It seems so strange to think you, too, are papa's daughter. I am glad to see you, my dear!"

As she drew Maize near her, and imprinted a kiss on her hand, the young girl felt an involuntary recoil of horror, as though a serpent had touched her.

"And now to business," Mr. Floyd said, giving Maize a chair, and then, the final reports were made by lawyer Braddon, the genuineness of the documents attested to by Mr. Lyman, who had personally investigated them, and additional light and evidence gained by the weight of Sylvia Florimel's testimony, which she gave with a direct truthfulness that satisfied even Maize, who, the whole case thus laid before her, arose from her chair, pale as marble.

"I have just one question to ask," she said. "Mr. Lyman, do you believe this rival claimant to Silverdale to be the rightful owner?"

"I do," he returned, reluctantly, solemnly.

"And you, Mr. Braddon?"

"I regret to say, I do," he answered, gravely.

"And you, Lacy?" she said, looking at her cousin with steady, piercing, appealing gaze, "do you believe this young lady to be the lawful heiress to Silverdale?"

For a second, an instant, Lacy Floyd flushed under her gaze, then he answered, solemnly, earnestly:

"I do! It is hard for me to say it, Maize, but I believe Sylvia Florimel is the legal owner of Silverdale!"

And then, not a quiver on her lips, not a shiver on her straight young figure, Maize held her proud little head well up.

"Then the case is settled! I have all confidence in the opinions expressed, and my judgment approves your decision."

Then, a swift little look of dreariness unutterable shadowed her beautiful eyes, as she hesitated a second, and then went on:

"And now but one question remains to be answered. What is to become of me?"

Sylvia Florimel raised her dainty little gloved hand, authoritatively.

"As Miss Maize's nearest relative, I beg to be allowed to demand that she be left where she is. My heart is touched for her; let her remain at Silverdale, I beg. Her position need be but slightly changed; I entreat that she remain."

Mr. Lyman looked pleased at the young lady's generosity, and he bowed with more warmth than usually characterized him.

"This is most noble, most kind, Miss Florimel, and as Miss Maize's guardian I thank you and cordially consent to a most suitable arrangement."

"And although I should have been overjoyed

to receive my cousin to my bachelor establishment, I yield to the better plan and also thank you, Miss Florimel, and accept on Miss Maize's behalf."

Maize listened quietly, and then, with a little ominous flash in her eyes, a look of stormy impatience gathering on her face, she looked from one guardian to the other.

"I beg to be allowed a voice in the matter of my own disposal, and I utterly decline to remain at Silverdale. It has already ceased to be my home. Since these people have entered it, I leave it."

"But, what will you do?" Mr. Lyman asked. "You don't mean to marry that bankrupt Grandcourt?"

Maize's eyes glanced darkly.

"Not yet," she returned, spiritedly. "I would do so to-morrow, could I go to him as the heiress of Silverdale, but I will be an incumbrance to no man. He will wait for me, and I will wait for him—although I will tell you he has urged me to an immediate marriage."

"It is out of the question, Maize, entirely out of the question that you ever contract such a marriage. Neither of your guardians would ever consent to anything so rash. Our duty to you, our promise to your dead parents would prevent our consent."

"Most positively," Mr. Lyman added.

"I can earn my own living. I can be a teacher, anything rather than remain here among people whom I despise."

Her face now flushed with mutinous scorn, and Claude Noel, writhing under it, yet felt every pulse leap with admiration and momentarily increasing passion for her.

"Then, you will return with me," Lacy Floyd said. "I will do my best to make you happy."

Ah! If she had but known!

It was the only refuge offered her; and Maize accepted it with gratitude, immediately withdrawing, going to Mrs. Weston and at once making her preparations for departure.

Over the pitiful heartsickness of the ten hours that intervened between the time of Maize's departure from the house of her birth, let a sacred curtain fall, hiding the tears, the farewells, the partings, the grief that was more bitter than death, but mercifully brief.

And the carriage drove away with Maize's marble-pale, tearless face looking straight ahead, and her maid, Lottie, whom Lacy Floyd had told to accompany her, flushed and tearful.

While, sitting eagerly beside the window, on the sofa Claude had wheeled up, Sylvia Florimel heaved a long sigh of exultation, as the carriage and the cart bearing the trunks passed out of sight.

"She is gone, bag and baggage! This is as it should be—you and I in undisturbed possession at last. Call Isabel; I want myself made comfortable, and at home, and then, I wish the servants summoned, and ourselves presented to them. Let us lose no time, Claude. Ring for my maid."

"In one moment," he answered. "How grandly she took it, didn't she? How royally

she bore her downfall! I tell you, Sylvia, I shall never rest until I have made her my wife! I love her—proud little beauty, and I will bring her here again as my wife almost before she knows it. She little dreams of the snares I have set for her, or that the strength she leans most upon will fail her in her time of need! I'll give her a month, and when I go to ask her again to marry me she'll fall into my arms!"

And as he rung for Isabel, he smiled exultantly.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT DID HE MEAN?

THE journey from Silverdale to Mr. Floyd's bachelor establishment in a quiet, semi-fashionable street in New York city, was accomplished promptly and quietly, Mr. Floyd's attentions and little unobtrusive kindnesses going a great way in Maize's homesickness and horrible desolation.

It was between four and five o'clock of the September afternoon, which, as if in sympathy with the cloud of misfortune that had darkened the young girl's life, had turned cold and raw and gray, that Maize, and her maid and Mr. Floyd alighted at the door of the house henceforth to be her home—a renewed sense of utter homesick desolation assailing her, but which she determinedly repressed, so far as speech and manner went, as, taking Mr. Floyd's arm, and followed by Lottie with the hand sachel, she ascended the steps and entered the door, where, just inside, they were met by Mr. Floyd's housekeeper, a middle-aged, disagreeable faced, sharp-eyed woman, who looked with suspicious, unfriendly glances at the new-comer, and for whom, in turn, Maize conceived an instinctive repulsion and aversion.

"It is Mrs. Duncan, my housekeeper," Mr. Floyd explained.

"Mrs. Duncan, this is my cousin, Miss Maize Florimel, come to remain indefinitely with us, and whom I wish you to regard as the mistress of the establishment. Her wishes and tastes are to be consulted in every particular."

As plainly as though Mrs. Duncan had said so, Maize knew she resented the rule of a mistress, where she had so long reigned supreme, but she merely bowed in silent sullenness and conducted Maize to her room, throwing open the door ungraciously, and returning below stairs, with the announcement that "supper" would be ready when the bell rung at six o'clock.

Left alone with her maid, Maize took a critical survey of her room, a large, pleasant apartment, even at that dull hour of a dull day. Its three windows faced the west, and looked out upon a row of similar windows on the opposite side of the street. It was furnished as a sort of parlor, with a new Brussels carpet, lace window drapery over the white linen shades, an easy-chair, a little damask Spanish lounge, an upright piano, a few good artists' proofs and some new books and music.

In the large alcove at one side, draped off by lace curtains, was the walnut, marble-topped bedroom suit, very pure and dainty looking with its two ruffled square pillows, and white coverlet, and the cut glass and gilt ornaments

on the dressing-case—a room that looked like a young girl's room.

"It seems as though everything had been prepared expressly for my coming, Lottie," Maize said, as she sunk wearily in the cosey chair the maid wheeled forward for her, her wraps laid aside. "My cousin Lacy must have known I would never remain at Silverdale with those people. He has furnished this pretty room for me during the two weeks between his visits."

Which was indeed the case. Lottie busied herself in laying out a toilette for her young mistress and, resolutely dismissing her cares, Maize dressed in a simple, elegant house dress of black silk, wearing black Spanish lace at her neck, with Roman gold ornaments that were particularly becoming to her.

At quarter to six she went down into the parlor, where Mr. Floyd was evidently awaiting her, and who, the moment Maize saw him, impressed her, to her inward surprise, as having to make a visible effort to conceal some secret and wonderful exultation.

He made a gentle, deprecatory little speech of apology for the great contrast between her old home and her new, and bade her a warm hearty welcome to all he had in the world, to which Maize said a word, gravely, with a faint smile she forced to her lips, and then the new life began, when a moment later, in response to the ringing of the "supper" bell, Maize was escorted to the dining-room, and shown her place at the table as mistress of the house. The following days were devoid of special interest. Mr. Lyman called upon her before he left the city, urging her to reconsider Claude Noel's offer, and departed lamenting the obstinacy of which the weaker sex was capable.

Resolutely cultivating a bright, hopeful spirit, Maize settled easily into her new position. She wrote letters to her lover and to Mrs. Weston. She had her daily walk, and several pleasant drives with Mr. Floyd. She had her music, her painting, some sewing, and between her duties and recreation the time passed not as drearily as she had dreaded.

And so, two or three weeks drifted by, until a day came that brought a change over the spirit of her dream—a day well into October, late in the afternoon, upon her return from depositing a letter to Mr. Grandcourt in a letter-box in the neighborhood. She had let herself in with a latch-key and, after taking off her sacque and hat in her own room had gone down into the parlor, which in the on-gathering twilight was full of weird shadows. For a few minutes, Maize remained there, her eyes full of thoughtful gravity as she stood gazing out in the fast darkening street; then, remembering a book she wished from the library, she went into that room, which adjoined the parlor, being separated by sliding, ground glass doors which now were slightly ajar. She knew where to lay her hand on the book, so did not light the gas, and had secured it and was about returning through the parlor when she heard some one entering the street door, then Floyd's voice speaking, and then—Claude Noel's!

"Step right into the library," Mr. Floyd said, briskly. "One moment first, however, until I make sure no one is there."

He struck a match, and applied it to the chain-drawer, while, in a sudden paroxysm of terror lest she be compelled to come face to face with her successful rival, Maize looked wildly around for some way of escape. But there was none, except through the parlor, in which the two men stood, and, without stopping to reason, she flew to the window of the library—an old-fashioned, deep-set window, before which heavy damask drapery hung—and concealed herself behind it, drawing the curtains together before her, making for herself a most secure hiding-place.

The movement was scarcely accomplished, when the sliding glass doors between parlor and library were opened, and Mr. Floyd entered the library, followed by Claude Noel.

"It's all right," Mr. Floyd said, pushing an easy-chair forward to his guest. "I thought no one was here at this time of day, but it was best to make sure. I'll just turn the key in the parlor door, and we'll be as secure from intrusion as though we were in a desert."

Noel took the proffered seat. He was not looking quite the same since he had taken possession of Silverdale. His manner and bearing were haughty and supercilious, the light in his eyes bolder and more insolent, and in many ways he betrayed the fact that his remarkable change of fortune did not agree with him.

As he seated himself, he leaned lazily back, stroking his heavy mustache.

"Well, how is everything? How's the girl?" he asked, familiarly.

"In her usual perfect health. Just now, she's out for exercise. She is patient and cheerful and brave under the shadow in which she must walk. I declare, my heart aches for her sometimes."

"Stuff and nonsense. Don't attempt any of your pussy-cat gush on me, Lacy! I know you too well."

Floyd laughed, manifesting not the slightest displeasure at the familiar insolence of his guest, and Maize was startled and amazed, for in her estimation, Lacy Floyd was one of the truest, kindest, gentlest of beings.

"I must not remain here an eavesdropper," she told herself, in an eager, wild way, for to listen to a conversation not meant for her was abhorrent to her upright, honorable nature. Yet, she had no way of escape, but to boldly declare her presence, and she had almost resolved to do it, when Mr. Floyd spoke again:

"As I said, Maize is cheerful and patient, and bright, despite the discouraging circumstances. I attribute much of it to her disposition, and not a little to the consolation she finds in writing to Grandcourt. She has written twice since she has been here, but has received no reply—"

Noel interrupted with a laugh.

"Indeed! How wonderful! I suppose she gave you the letters to mail?"

"Yes, she knows of my disapproval of the engagement between them, but she confided in my honor, and writes him openly—something I did not consider it worth while to forbid."

Noel laughed again.

"You're a genius, Lacy! You take the

letters and drop them in the fire instead of the letter-box, and save all annoyance."

Floyd shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well, if you put it that way! As Maize's guardian, I take the liberty of opening and reading her letters. They did not meet my approval, consequently I suppressed them."

"And, I suppose, you also, as a matter of conscientious duty, suppressed Grandcourt's to her."

"Exactly. The lazy beggar must have nothing to do but write, as I have four in my possession he has sent her since she's been here."

In her hiding-place Maize crouched, trembling and shocked. The unexpected treachery she had discovered that her cousin, her trusted guardian, her devoted friend, was in reality base and false, was more an overwhelming shock to her than the amazing deception she learned he had practiced.

"But don't overdo the thing, Lacy," Noel suggested, reflectively. "If Grandcourt don't hear from her pretty soon, he will suspect something and come to the scene. Imitate the girl's handwriting—I know your ability in that line—and bluff him off. And now to my special business in hand, Lacy. As I intimated, I have come to renew my offer of marriage to Miss Florimel. I love her distractedly, and I mean to lose no time in winning her. I would like to take her back with me to Silverdale as my bride."

"Which means you intend to spend a little time in the city. Very well. It is important that you should marry Maize, and the sooner the better, for once her husband, you can defy fate or accident. The marriage is a most necessary point in the battle we are waging. Then you will be safe."

"Safe! But am I not safe now?" Noel demanded, in an eager, startled tone of voice.

"Not so safe but that some possible accident might hurl you and Sylvia back into your original obscurity. You need not question me, Claude, for I shall not explain. Enough that I know just where a possible danger threatens you, just the one weak point in the armor, which, understand me, if Maize knew, if Asher Lyman suspected, would place Maize back in her old position at Silverdale to-morrow, and you and Sylvia where you were. I am the only man in the world who has the power of injuring you, but you are safe with me. I would rather die than betray you!"

Noel looked incredulously in Floyd's face, but the incredulity changed into conviction that indeed Lacy Floyd was in possession of a secret which, if known, would ruthlessly sweep him from his new position; and as the conviction deepened and laid hold upon him, a cold sweat broke out upon his forehead.

While Maize, too, fully comprehended the full force of every syllable Lacy Floyd had uttered, and a cold, agonized trembling seized her.

"There is a flaw in that woman's claims to Silverdale, and he, my cousin, my guardian, my friend, know it, and knowing, he deliberately befriends the usurper and defrauds the orphan girl intrusted to his care! There is surely some terrible secret here!"

A silence fell between the two men, and finally, as though he had meant to give Noel time to digest what he had already said, Mr. Floyd continued:

"What my motives were and are, in forwarding your claims, I decline to tell you, but this one thing you know—I am your best friend, Claude Noel. I have made your and Sylvia's way to riches and position an easy one; I have connived at a fraud which renders the rightful heiress—mark me!—the rightful heiress—penniless, for the sake of installing your sister in her place. But I mean to restore much of that of which I have defrauded her, so you see I am not so bad as you may think. By arrangement with Sylvia, Silverdale is largely your own, and through you, Silverdale must return to Maize. She shall become your wife, if I have to force her into it. I will be so far just, that I will break her heart in order to compel her to be mistress of her own again! She will find my will adamant."

"May I see her this evening?" Noel asked, after a few moments' impressive silence.

"If she has come in—at once. Be gallant and chivalrous and devoted, Claude; women like such men, and it is in your power to make yourself a hero in Maize's eyes. You are rich, young, handsome—good reasons for your meeting with success. I will call her at once."

And as he moved toward the door, Maize flung aside the sweeping drapery and stepped forth, her face glowing, her shiny eyes glancing from one to the other, of the utterly horrified countenances before her.

"You need not call me, Mr. Floyd! I am here! I have overheard every word of your conversation. Now, what have you to say to me, sir?"

CHAPTER VII.

WAR TO THE KNIFE.

As Maize's ringing, scornful voice sounded upon their ears, and she made her totally unexpected appearance before them, the utter consternation of her guardian and her visitor can well be imagined.

Claude Noel sprung to his feet, uttering a bitter oath, while Lacy Floyd, pale as the dead, did not move a muscle of his body, as he looked at her, in absolute anguish, terror and dread. And so a minute, so long it seemed an hour to each of them, passed in that momentous, awful silence, and then, Floyd's thin hands began to clasp and unclasp nervously, and he found voice to speak—a poor, pitiful, quavering voice.

"You, you—have been in the room all the time—all the time, Maize?"

"All the time," she answered, drearily. "I heard every word that has been said how you have intercepted my letters to Mr. Grandcourt, and his to me. I thought you so noble and generous and good, Lacy, I loved and trusted you, and I find you utterly base, dishonorable and treacherous. Oh, Lacy, how could you, how could you!"

The big tears filled and overflowed her grieved eyes. Her sweet, sensitive mouth quivered, and a look of infinite pain paled her face, and Lacy Floyd turned away his eyes as though a crushing blow had been dealt him.

"I know, now, that I should have contested this man's sister's claim to Silverdale," Maize went on, the emotion leaving her voice. "I know that Mr. Lyman, Mr. Braddon, even, have been misled by you, Lacy—but it is not an irreparable error. I shall leave this house to-night, and travel as fast as steam can take me to Mr. Lyman's home, tell him what I have overheard and immediately return to Silverdale, as its rightful mistress. Justice shall be done, and my grandfather's and father's inheritance shall not go to one who has no right to it."

On her proud, resolute face was a look of stern sadness terrible to see in a young girl, and Claude Noel, in a wild alarm, rung out like a call to battle, in Lacy Floyd's anguished ears:

"Do you mean to let her ruin us?"

His mild, gentle face looking years older, haggard and wan, Floyd turned beseechingly to the young girl, striving to command himself.

"You do not know what you say," he pleaded. "You cannot prove a syllable of your assertions; I shall deny them, *in toto*; my reputation as an honorable and truthful man being too well established to be assailed successfully. No one will believe you—"

"I do not seek to expose your treachery, but to regain my rights," Maize interrupted, with a flash of contempt in her eyes. "The question I shall instruct Mr. Lyman to submit to a jury will be—who is the owner of Silverdale?"

Noel uttered an exclamation of renewed alarm, while, seeming to have suddenly gained possession of all his habitual caution and self-command, Mr. Floyd quietly arose from his chair, closed the library door, locked it and put the key in his pocket, a look of desperation gleaming in his eyes, a stern, rigid expression hardening his face.

"Do you mean to threaten us, Maize? Is there to be war between us?"

She returned his look with brown eyes sparkling with resolve.

"I mean to recover my stolen inheritance," she replied, coldly. "Step aside, Lacy Floyd! I desire to pass through the doorway."

"That you can not do," he returned, promptly. "You do not leave this room until we come at a definite settlement of this affair. I will make you a proposition: that, since matters have been forced to an issue, you give me your word of honor that you will marry Claude Noel, and thus—"

"Never!" she interrupted, with impetuous passion. "Not if I am locked in here a prisoner on bread-and-water until the day of my death. I will arouse the servants; you must not think you can intimidate me thus."

She stepped swiftly toward the little blue-and-gold tassel on the other side of the room, but Noel was before her, and had cut the cord far beyond her reach.

With a smile of scorn, she turned back to the window in which she had been concealed; a second thought reminded her escape thence was impossible, even had the shutters not been closed, for it opened over the kitchen-area, ten or fifteen feet below, around which was a sharp-spiked iron railing.

Quick as a flash, she realized the wisdom of ceasing resistance. She was a prisoner indeed,

and she accepted the position with a grace that thrilled every pulse of Claude Noel's frame.

"I yield to your superior strength," she said, with an imperious little bow. "Now, having achieved such a brilliant victory, what, may I inquire, do you intend to do next?"

Floyd had, in regaining his self-command, cast aside all regret, weakness and indecision, feeling that as immense interests were at stake, he must rise to the occasion, and as Claude Noel watched his pale, determined, relentless face, he began to feel he was in hands he might safely trust.

"My intention is readily told," Floyd returned, with a peculiar, strengthful quiet. "I intend to obtain your promise to marry Claude Noel."

She looked gravely at him.

"You certainly know me better than this, Lacy," she returned. "I am not afraid of you, or this man, and I have no cowardice to which your importunities or threats can appeal."

Nor did persuasion or threats avail, both of which Lacy Floyd faithfully tried. Maize was obliged to listen, perforce, but she was not in the faintest degree to be coerced or driven.

An hour passed thus, and Claude Noel grew freshly alarmed at Maize's unassailable positiveness, while, always angered by opposition, Lacy Floyd grew hardened and relentless.

"What are we to do?" Noel asked, impatiently, at last. "She won't give in, and she will go to Mr. Lyman with her story—"

"She will not go to Asher Lyman with her story," Floyd interrupted, with ominous quiet. "I know Lyman too well to allow him to hear her, for in his stern justice he will leave not a stone on the face of the earth unturned but he'll find how much truth there is in it. Of a jury I have no fear, for they will decide the merits of the case by the facts before them, and the facts are on our side. All I dread is, that Asher Lyman will remove Maize from our reach, and so prevent her marriage to you, and that would be equivalent, nearly, to turning you adrift again."

"But—I don't see what you are going to do about it," Noel insisted, in angry desperation of impatience. "She won't promise."

"No, she will *not* promise!" Maize replied, composedly.

"Very well, then," Floyd said, a desperately angry look flashing in his eyes. "You may consider yourself a prisoner until you do. Mr. Lyman, fortunately, is not in the city. You have no acquaintances or friends with whom I will allow you to communicate, in the city or out of it. If any one calls to inquire for you, it will be easy to tell them you are away from home. Meanwhile, until your rebellious spirit breaks or bends you will be locked safely in your room."

Maize smiled, contemptuously.

"And you suppose I will remain locked up long in a room with three windows opening on a public street? How long do you imagine such imprisonment will last with my wide-awake, faithful, intelligent maid Lottie with me? And you may rest assured no dismissal of yours would send her from me if I was in trouble. If you wish to save yourself scandal and annoy-

ance, you will be sensible to open that door and allow me to leave the room quietly."

"All very fine, Maize. But, in the first place, there is a way to prevent a syllable of scandal, but it does not include giving you your liberty. As to your maid, that is of scarcely importance enough to mention; Lottie will be no trouble. About your present room, at the front of the house—that certainly is an objection upon which I shall consult a woman's wit. Just ring for Mrs. Duncan, Claude."

Noel succeeded in reaching the severed bell-rope by using the library steps, and in a moment Mrs. Duncan appeared, admitted by Floyd, who instantly locked the door again, returning the key to his pocket.

Mrs. Duncan surveyed the scene with dilated eyes, regarding Noel with glances that were curious and almost anxious, in the second that elapsed before Floyd closed the sliding glass doors, leaving himself and his housekeeper virtually alone in the parlor.

"What is the matter?" she asked, uneasily.

"Who is that young man?"

"Claude Noel."

Mrs. Duncan uttered an exclamation of intensest excitement.

"Claude—Noel! Is it possible?—Claude Noel! Sylvia's brother! That—really—Claude!"

Every feature in her face betrayed her agitation, and her plain, cross face grew almost refined in its pallor.

"Never mind about him now. I need your assistance, and I want you to listen."

And then, in minute detail, he narrated all the circumstances of the position.

"You must help me. You know, as well as I do, that she must marry him. Bring it about, Esther, and for your reward I will grant you the prayer you have made of me for years. I will marry you on the day they are married."

She caught his hand in an agitated sort of impulse, and kissed it over and over.

"I would die to have that justice done me! You may depend upon me, Lacy; she shall marry Sylvia's brother. But does he know the secret—the truth, I mean?"

"Claude? No, not a syllable, nor must he know. Be guarded, Esther, on every side. Now, we will join them, and I will depend on you."

He slid the door back, and they entered the library, where Claude Noel stood before Maize, pleading his suit with a passionate eloquence worthy a noble cause, while the young girl's eyes were looking straight away from him as though she did not hear a word.

Floyd introduced Mrs. Duncan to Noel, and although he wondered at her keen, almost intense scrutiny of his face, he was too engrossed otherwise to think of it but the passing moment, for Mrs. Duncan turned to Maize, with a hard, grim look on her face.

"So you refuse to obey your guardian, Miss Florimel?"

Maize did not condescend to reply, and Mrs. Duncan turned to Mr. Floyd.

"Such a spirit needs to be broken down. I think she needs to be shut up until she can submit. It will only be a question of time and patience. You can't lock her up in this house."

so you must take her elsewhere—take her to the little house I own in the country. My niece lives there, and she'll be glad enough to take care of her. Have a close carriage at the door at twelve o'clock to-night, and if anybody sees or hears us they'll think we're catching a late train. I'll see that Lottie is safe and sound in her bed with a chloroform sponge under her nose. I'll pack the luggage, and arrange everything."

Floyd and Noel listened to her with deepening satisfaction on their faces.

"You are worth your weight in gold, Mrs. Duncan," Noel exclaimed, enthusiastically. "You have the brains of a lawyer."

"No—of a woman, only" she said, as she withdrew to at once begin her preparations.

It was now far past ten o'clock, and it had struck eleven when she returned, announcing that every thing was in readiness—Miss Florimel's trunk in the hall, the carriage at the door.

"And there is nothing left you but to obey," Floyd said to Maize, as Mrs. Duncan brought her mantle and hat and gloves. "Are you ready?"

Maize instantly arose, a defiant gleam in her eyes.

"Ready and glad that this ridiculous farce is at an end. I shall be glad to get out of the house, in the street. I tell you beforehand, I shall not tamely submit. I shall appeal to the driver—"

Mrs. Duncan produced a vial, from which she removed the cork, the sweet, sickish fumes of chloroform escaping instantly.

"I am on my guard, Miss Florimel. Unless you promise me you will not make any trouble I will drug you and have you carried to the carriage."

Maize's face flushed with indignation. She looked from Lacy Floyd to Claude Noel, but she saw only mercilessness and pitilessness, and to save herself the horror and helplessness of unconsciousness, she haughtily promised to be silent.

And by her own unaided efforts, walked swiftly out to the carriage, the two men on either side of her, and Mrs. Duncan leading the way. The entire party entered the carriage, and, thus closely guarded, Maize was carried away—to what?

CHAPTER VIII.

A BRAVE SOUL.

THE coach rolled rapidly away from Lacy Floyd's door, the helpless young prisoner between her two jailers, sitting in haughty silence while she secretly marked the route by which she went, as far as her acquaintance with the way permitted.

It was a long while before they left the streets of the city behind them, and struck the open country, and then Maize's conjectures came to an end as to what direction she was being taken.

In absolute silence the four occupants of the carriage rode along through the darkness of the night; and then, after perhaps an hour's time, the horses came to a halt.

Mrs. Duncan peered out, and then alighted in front of a gate which she held open, while, with

a tight gripe of Maize's arm, Lacy Floyd assisted her to descend, followed closely by Claude Noel.

"Bring in the young lady's trunk, and then return and wait for us—it will only be a few minutes," Floyd said to the driver, as, preceded by Mrs. Duncan, they walked through the front yard and up to the front door, when Mrs. Duncan rung the bell, and, after some delay and explanations made to a night-capped head thrust from the window above, an entrance was effected, just as the cabman deposited the trunk on the piazza.

Maize looked curiously at the niece of Mrs. Duncan, who was to be her jailer; but her heart sunk at sight of the morose, vixenish face, the red hair and angular figure—stamped from head to foot with hard harshness—strangely like yet very unlike Mrs. Duncan, who, with all her cruel disagreeableness, had a certain air of better-bredness and even elegance about her.

In a few concise words, after being announced by Mrs. Duncan to "her niece, Matilda Dunne," Lacy Floyd explained the position—who Maize was, what was expected of her and required of her jailer.

Miss Dunne vigorously promised to agree to bring the young lady to "her duty," the price to be paid her decided upon, and in less than twenty minutes after the midnight guests had arrived at her house, Miss Dunne had prepared a room for Maize's occupation.

At her announcement, made after a short absence from the little parlor, Lacy Floyd arose and seized Maize's arm to conduct her to her prison-cell, but she flung off his touch as though a serpent had endeavored to coil around her arm, and confronted him, her face so white that it startled him, her dusky brown eyes shining like suns, her countenance instinct with stern wrath.

"Do not dare touch me, Lacy Floyd! False friend, false guardian, false relative! Hypocrite, I know you at last, but you cannot force me to do your will. You know I am no coward—you know that no amount of coercion can ever drive me into an act from which my whole soul revolts!"

"I am willing to put it to the test," he said, quietly.

A sudden change passed over Maize's face, for, despite her courage, her faith in herself, she shrank appalled from the ordeal before her. A passionate pain was in her eyes, and her sweet mouth quivered, as, in a piteous pleading impulse, she looked at him.

"Lacy!—it is not too late yet to turn back! Return to your honor, your duty, I pray you! I will forgive you, I will overlook the wrong you have done me if you will repent, and restore to me my rights, Lacy! In mercy to the memory of my dead father, whose cousin you were, whose trusted, beloved friend you were, in mercy to me, so alone and friendless, do what is right—even at this eleventh hour!"

Then, seeing that her impassioned pleading was utterly thrown away, she added:

"Refuse, and when my hour of triumph comes, as come it will, you will find me merciless also!"

For answer, his thin lips curled in a sneering smile and he advanced toward her.

"I hope to find you in a better mood when I see you again, Maize. Now, if you please, we will go up to your room."

In obedience to his gesture, Mrs. Duncan seized one of Maize's arms, while he grasped the other, and Miss Dunne preceding them with a light, they went up-stairs, to a room in the attic, a large, dismal, barn-like place, uncarpeted and unspeakably forlorn, lighted only by a small glass skylight in the very peak of the roof. An iron bedstead, a dilapidated wash-stand, a wooden chair and Maize's box, which Miss Dunne had carried up, constituted the entire furnishing of the place, from which Lacy Floyd shrunk involuntarily as they entered, while Maize walked in, proud and high-headed as a queen treading the marble floor of her audience-chamber, for whatever her secret terror and anguish she would not betray herself to her enemies.

"It is hardly so luxurious as your rooms at Silverdale," he said, "but you may exchange at any time. It is not too late to yield, Maize, even now, and I would gladly, gladly save you this experience. Say but the word, and be restored to liberty, riches and luxury, Maize."

Her lips curled.

"Life for the rest of my existence, is preferable here, to the alternative you offer," she returned, coldly.

"Then you shall have the full benefit of your stubbornness," he returned, turning to leave, and then, followed by the two women, he went down-stairs, and, standing proud and unconquered, yet with death-pale face and dilated eyes that could see nothing in the deep darkness, Maize heard them descend the stairs; later, heard them leave the house, and so her gloomy, terrible imprisonment began, than which one more barbarous could not have been devised. She had no glimpse of the world outside, no books, no occupation of any sort, absolutely nothing to do but suffer her wearying thoughts, and pass the hours of the night in restless, unrefreshing sleep. Three times a day Miss Dunne brought her a supply of hard dry bread and water, at every visit urging her to comply with Mr. Floyd's demands, to which harangues Maize simply listened because she could not help herself, and to which she never deigned to reply.

Thus a weary week went by, that seemed a month to the captive girl, when the dreary monotony was broken by a visit from Lacy Floyd, to whom the news of Miss Dunne that her prisoner was absolutely unconquerable was keenly disconcerting.

"It's a big job I've got on my hands," Miss Dunne declared. "It's my belief she won't give in while there's a breath in her."

Floyd's brow contracted darkly.

"I begin to see I have a Satan to deal with! I half wish she was dead."

"You half wish she was—what?"

"Nothing. I'll go up and have a talk with her. Perhaps she will display less spirit to me. Give me a light and the key."

As Miss Dunne said, Lacy Floyd found her utterly untamed, wholly unsubmitive, as proud, spirited, fearless in the midst of her adversities and misfortunes as she had been in

her happiest days, and Lacy Floyd knew, as well as he knew anything, that only death would break her spirit.

"Do not mention your pretended regrets to me," she said, passionately, during their interview. "Since I have been shut up here I have thought and wondered and speculated until I have come to a solemn conviction that you have had designs against me all the years you have pretended to think so much of me."

A sudden apprehensive look darkened his face.

"I believe this very condition of affairs—the coming forward of this Sylvia Florimel—has been anticipated by you for years," she went on, with intense eagerness. "You have known her all her life, and you have planned to make her heiress to Silverdale. You have schemed to this end. You intended to remove every barrier between Sylvia Florimel and the prize you meant her to win, until you found in me, a weak, delicate girl, an obstacle not so easy to remove. While my father and my grandfather lived you kept silent, when their death left the way clear, you made your treacherous move!"

Lacy Floyd's face grew positively livid. His eyes dilated as though he had seen a ghost instead of only hearing a young girl's passionate words.

And Maize saw how her accusation struck no random blow.

"With your own lips you said, in my hearing, that morally, in the eyes of God, my dear old home is still my own. And it must be mine again, in the eyes of man."

"You know the terms," he said, a curious tremble in his voice.

"Never on those terms! I would not marry Claude Noel to save my life!"

"Do you know what that implies?" he asked, after a second's pause.

"I adhere to it, whatever it implies!"

An awful smile—such a smile that it made her recoil with a sensation of terror from what seemed the embodiment of some terrible, deadly purpose—played ghastly on his lips, and then, fixing her bright, steadfast eyes on him, she demanded, with startling abruptness:

"Lacy Floyd, what is the secret link between you and Claude Noel and Sylvia Florimel?"

For answer, he glared at her in demoniacal fury.

"I would like to give you a last chance to patch up a truce," he said presently, in a thick, hoarse voice, which Maize interrupted:

"You do not think best to answer my question? My discoveries do not please you."

"Your discoveries! And what of your precious discoveries? You mean, perhaps, to escape—to see Asher Lyman—to unburden your bosom—to denounce me as a conspirator—to contest your claim to Silverdale? A charming programme, beyond doubt, but one which, unfortunately for you, is utterly infeasible."

"Then I will stay here as long as your patience holds out, for, sooner or later, you will be compelled to grant me my liberty. You cannot hide a girl like me away from the world very long without inquiries being made by her friends. Mr. Grandcourt will demand to know

my whereabouts; Mrs. Weston will make inquiries; Lottie will not desert me. Suspicion will fall upon you, and you will be compelled to produce me."

Evidently Maize had not even yet comprehended a modicum of Lacy Floyd's capabilities for wickedness. She apprehended nothing more than a prolonged captivity, even when, without a word, he smiled at her with a perfect devil in his lurid eyes and slowly left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

INTO THE TRAP.

As he went slowly down the narrow stairs, dark even in the daytime, Lacy Floyd came deliberately to the conclusion that since it was impossible to break Maize's brave spirit, since by her own words she knew far more than was good for him and the cause he had espoused, heroic measures were immediately necessary. Maize must be disposed of, beyond question; but how?

The question brought a pale, desperate determination to his face that Matilda Dunne saw when he re-entered the sitting-room.

"You found it just as I said! You'll never conquer her, never. You can starve her to death, but—"

Floyd interrupted her abruptly.

"Where's Sandy?"

"Where's Sandy!" she repeated, in sudden, shrinking terror, as she stared with frightened eyes up in Floyd's face. "And what might you want with the poor boy that never did you any harm?"

"No, not to me, but all the same he's the veriest rascal that ever contrived to keep out of jail. There's a reward of a thousand dollars for his capture, to-day, on account of the bank-burglary last spring—that precious brother of yours. You couldn't tell me where he is, Miss Dunne? If I'd agree to befriend him?"

A suspicious, incredulous look came to her eyes, that his sharp gaze saw and correctly construed.

"Ah! I understand! I happened to strike a sure blow unawares. You do know where Sandy Dunne is. Is he around here? In the house, concealed?"

There was no need for an answer. Her cowering figure, her blanched face, her affrighted eyes assured him that he had guessed exactly.

"You need have no fear, none whatever. Sandy is as safe with me as with you. Go to him, tell him that I not only swear not to betray him, but will put him in the way of making a hundred dollars and at the same time preserve his safety."

"You are in earnest?"

"In earnest," Floyd returned with a sincerity not to be doubted. "I have a little piece of business on hand of somewhat irregular character, and Sandy's the man for me."

For answer, Miss Dunne opened the door leading to a deep, dark pantry, just inside which sat a dark, lowering faced young fellow of twenty-four or five.

"You hear what Mr. Floyd says, Sandy, dear," said Miss Dunne. "Come out, and he'll protect you, and give you the job, and be in the

same boat with you. I'll go bring you something to drink while you're talking your business over."

Reluctantly and nervously the young reprobate crept out from where his sister had hidden him upon hearing Floyd descending the stairs. The eyes of the two men met, and in that scrutinizing glance the two black natures at once thoroughly comprehended each other.

Left to themselves, without Lacy Floyd having betrayed himself, he came to an understanding with Sandy Dunne. He related as much of the story about Maize Florimel as he deemed necessary, and then in low, quiet tones, told Sandy that the girl was in the way.

"In the way! Then, what are you going to do?" Sandy asked, in stupid wonder. And Floyd whispered in a voice that was a hiss:

"Remove her! That is what I want your services for, my man. Refuse, and I'll deliver you to the police with my own hands," and as he spoke Floyd significantly took a revolver from his pocket. "Promise to obey, and seek to play off, and I'll set them on your track."

A gleam like sunlight on glass seemed to shoot from Lacy Floyd's eyes, and Sandy recoiled from the hideous purpose he read in them.

"I'm bad—I'm bad enough, but I ain't so bad as that. She's a young, helpless, innocent thing—Oh, Mr. Floyd, I can't—I can't—"

"Very well. If your delicate conscience has such scruples, it will be as well that you nurse it inside the walls of Auburn prison for the next fifteen years of your life. Which will you do? Obey or be handed over inside of an hour?"

A cold sweat burst out on Sandy's forehead.

"I—I—I—will do it!" he whispered hoarsely, and Lacy Floyd smiled.

"Sensible young man. Now, listen to my instructions."

In low, cautious tones he unfolded his plan, never once removing his eyes from his confederate's appalled face.

"You understand it thoroughly? In every detail? You can manage it, beyond doubt?"

"Yes," Sandy said, in that same horrified, husky voice.

Floyd then gave him an amount of money, reiterated his instructions, bidding him keep concealed until he received by messenger a certain parcel next day, and then he went away, exulting in his success—never seeing, as he strode through the gloomy yard, now doubly gloomy in the falling dusk of the October evening, a creeping, crouching figure—the figure of Lottie Orr, Maize's faithful maid.

Since the night, a week before, that Maize had disappeared from Mr. Floyd's house, Lottie had remained, entertaining no suspicions, feeling no doubt of the story that Maize had gone to visit Mrs. Weston, having been summoned by telegram to that lady's sick bedside, until, between receiving no message from her mistress, as was Maize's kindly custom when absent, and noting the daily visits at the house of Claude Noel, her suspicious fears had become suddenly aroused, and she had ventured to telegraph to Mrs. Weston, inquiring if Miss Florimel were there, and well. To which came an immediate

answer, saying that Mrs. Weston had not seen Maize since their parting at Silverdale.

Terrified, and wild with anxiety, Lottie resolved to write a letter to Mr. Wilton Grandcourt, which letter was intercepted by the faithful Mrs. Duncan, and read by both herself and Lacy Floyd, who decided upon instantly dismissing her, and while not letting her know her letter had not been mailed, threatened her with all the terrors of the law if she persisted in declaring Miss Florimel was not with Mrs. Weston, which assurance was renewed. Her wages were paid, and she was ordered to return at once to Silverdale, to await Miss Maize's approaching visit, when she left Mrs. Weston's.

And, apparently meek and obedient, and terrified, Lottie left the house, and taking up her residence in a distant quarter of the city, resolved to watch Mr. Floyd and Claude Noel as best she could, when suddenly remembering having heard one of the housemaids at Mr. Floyd's speak of Miss Dunne, Mrs. Duncan's niece, who lived in Mrs. Duncan's cottage in the suburbs, Lottie decided to pay the place a visit, impelled by a feeling she could not explain or understand.

By mere accident, she had reached there just in time to see Lacy Floyd leaving, and her joy at the recognition may be imagined, for it was proof positive to her that Maize was within the house, that her vague suspicions were correct.

"Now I know what Mrs. Duncan meant when I overheard her say to Mr. Floyd about 'breaking her spirit!' I see it all; my poor dear Miss Maize refused to marry Mr. Noel, and they brought her here until she gives in! My poor darling Miss Maize!"

She gazed at the darkened windows of the house with eager, wistful eyes.

"She's in there, I know it, but how can I get to see her to let her know I am here? Perhaps it will be best if I make no attempt to get in. I will telegraph to Mr. Grandcourt, although he did not answer my letter. He'll come at once, and I'll meet him and bring him here. And by to-morrow this time, Miss Maize shall be free!"

Thus strengthening her sinking heart, Lottie returned to the *coupe* in waiting, some distance down the road, and went back to the city.

While, all unconscious of it all, Maize was enduring the tedious hours of her imprisonment, little dreaming what was to befall her.

Early the next morning, the promised "parcel" arrived, which contained a full and complete disguise for Sandy Dunne—a partly worn suit of sailor's attire and a rough wig and beard of jetty black, which changed him so marvelously that his sister shrieked out with terror at the sight of him when he entered her presence. By eight o'clock he was gone, point-blank refusing to tell Miss Dunne where, for what, or what the nature of the little business between him and Mr. Floyd had been. At six o'clock of the same day he returned, evidently in great satisfaction with himself, but still refusing to take his sister into his confidence in spite of her importunities.

At her usual hour, ten o'clock, Miss Dunne retired, and at eleven the key of Maize's attic prison was drawn from under her heavy head by Sandy's cautious fingers, with which he

silently ascended the attic stairs, and reaching Maize's door listened stealthily for a moment, and then, putting his mouth to the key-hole, whispered:

"Miss Florimel!"

There was a sudden start inside, then low, trembling footsteps neared the door, and a fearful, eager voice answered him.

"Who is it?" Maize asked.

"Hush-sh! Be quiet or you'll rouse up the old maid below! Hush-sh! It's a friend!"

"A friend! A friend, did you say?" whispered the low-sweet, eager voice within.

"Yes, I'm coming in—hush-sh, now!"

And softly and skilfully he unlocked the door, opened it, and stepped just inside. It was dark as Erebus—the poor young prisoner could not see the glow in his eyes, he could not see the eager paleness of her face, as she reached out her hand and touched his arm.

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"Sandy Dunne, *her* brother, just come home from sea last night, miss, and found out you was shut up here against your will. And I made up my mind I wouldn't stand it, and I ain't a-going to. I'll help you to escape if only you'll be quiet as a kitten, so *she* won't hear us, for there'd be not a scrap of us left if she wakes. Are you ready for a journey, Miss Florimel?"

It seemed to Maize she must be dreaming, yet she answered eagerly:

"I am ready, except my hat and wrap. I'll find them. I have them. I am ready, I am all ready," she whispered, eagerly.

"Then come, only be still as a mouse, miss," and, his shoes in his hand, he led the way down, while, noiseless as a shadow, she followed, her heart swelling with rapturous gratitude that was almost unendurable as at length they stood out under the stars, in the sweet pure night air.

"Oh, how can I ever thank you?" she said brokenly, as she looked up at him with her glorious dark eyes that struck him as no eyes had ever done before.

"Let me see you safe wherever you wish to go, Miss Florimel," he said. "I don't want any other thanks. Where's it to be? The city?"

"Oh, no!" she said, with a shiver of horror.

"To Silverdale, then?"

"No, not yet! I am very friendless, Mr. Dunne. I have a guardian who is still at his summer residence at Cape May. I will go to him."

"You can go by train, there, to-morrow, and you will want to go to a hotel in the city to-night, then. I have a carriage ready to drive you in—I thought it'd be the city. As far as getting to Cape May goes, if it wasn't that it ain't the fanciest vessel for a lady, I believe I'd take you in my sloop, if you'd go."

"Your sloop! Your own vessel, Mr. Dunne? Oh, it would be just the thing for me—Mr. Floyd, one of my guardians, who shut me up in your sister's care, will never be able to overtake me before I get to Mr. Lyman! Mr. Dunne, I pray you take me to Cape May in your own boat. I have money. I will pay you handsomely. I pray you do this for me."

"Blessed if I don't!" he exclaimed, with apparent heartiness. "I'm afraid you won't find

it very comfortable, but I'll do the best I can for you. We'll get aboard and be off before daylight. Here's the carriage, Miss Florimel."

He assisted her in, and took his place outside on the driver's seat, touched up the horse and dashed toward the city.

While in a very ecstasy of joy Maize cried a storm of tears.

"Free! free! Ob, thank God!"

But if she had only known!

CHAPTER X.

AT MIDNIGHT.

HALF-WAY between the city and the cottage they had just left, Maize and her treacherous conductor passed a carriage, driving rapidly in the direction from which they had just come—and no subtle instinct told the occupants of either coach who it was they passed, and yet, it was the very sarcasm of fate that in the carriage hastening toward Miss Dunne's cottage, was Wilton Grandcourt and Lottie Orr.

Faithful to her resolution to lose not a moment longer than was absolutely necessary, Lottie, upon being driven back to the city, had gone at once to a telegraph office and dispatched a most urgent message to Mr. Grandcourt, begging him to come instantly to the relief of her young mistress.

It had happened, however, that Mr. Grandcourt had been absent from home when the first thing in the morning, the telegram had been delivered at Grandcourt, and consequently Lottie waited in vain, feverish impatience all that day for him, at the address she had given him, and the next day until just afternoon when a dispatch reached her saying Mr. Grandcourt had only just received her message and would start for the city on the first train, reaching her at a specified time.

Punctually on time, Mr. Grandcourt drove up to the humble little lodging-house at which Lottie was staying, finding her ready to start without a moment's notice, and so pale and worn that he was startled at sight of her.

"Lottie!" he exclaimed, apprehensively. "What is the matter? Where is Miss Florimel? What is the difficulty? I could gather from your dispatch only that your mistress is in trouble."

"We will go to her at once, sir. I was sure you would bring a carriage—let us lose no time. I will tell you all on the way."

Amazed, Mr. Grandcourt obeyed her eager command, and, the order given the driver at Lottie's instruction, they set off, at a rousing speed toward the cottage Maize was about the same hour leaving.

The consternation of Mr. Grandcourt on hearing the story Lottie had to relate even passed description, as he learned item by item, what had transpired, from the visit of Claude Noel to the letter Lottie had sent him, and yet, he could scarcely realize the terrible enormity of the affair.

White and cold with horror, he sat listening to the revelations Lottie made, and her perfect conviction in her conclusions concerning Lacy Floyd and his capacity for wickedness inspired Mr. Grandcourt with a similar belief, difficult though it was to realize that the smiling, pleas-

ant-mannered, gentle-voiced gentleman whom Maize had so trusted and honored, was such a monster of wickedness. A galloping speed brought them to the lonely little cottage in a short time, and arriving at the gate, he bid the driver wait, no matter how long, supplementing his order with the promise of a magnificent fee for the night's work, and then, followed by Lottie, he hastened up the walk to the front door, where he knocked loudly, with imperative impatience.

As on the occasion of previous midnight visits, Miss Dunne thrust her unkempt head from the bedroom window.

"Is it you, Mr. Floyd?" she asked in a loud, cautious whisper. "Don't knock so loud—you'll arouse the next-door people. I'll let you right in, sir."

In the darkness she had neither seen Lottie, nor discovered that her visitor was not Lacy Floyd, and a moment later she quietly opened the door.

"What's up, sir? Nothing the matter—"

Mr. Grandcourt stepped suddenly inside, Lottie closely after him, and not till then, when the broad glare of the lamp Miss Dunne had deposited on the landing at the head of the stairs, fell full upon his face, did Miss Dunne comprehend the mistake.

With a shriek of terror she sprang back, while Lottie closed the front door after her.

"Be quiet," Mr. Grandcourt said, commandingly. "We are not burglars or murderers, woman."

Somehow, his stern voice, his handsome, resolute face, with its determined blue eyes, inspired her with equal obedience and terror.

"What—wh—what do you want?" she chattered.

"I am come to see Miss Florimel," he said. "Show me to her instantly."

Miss Dunne uttered an involuntary cry, at once defiant and terrified.

"Miss Florimel! Who's she? I don't know any such person. There's no such person in this house."

"Very well," Mr. Grandcourt replied, coolly. "That's your word for it. I have such good reason to doubt it that I shall look for her myself."

As he spoke, Lottie darted up the staircase and seized the lamp, while, with a scream, Miss Dunne followed her wildly, rushing to the door of Sandy's room, which she burst open in a panic of fear and dismay.

"Sandy! Sandy! wake up and—"

And finding that the room was empty.

While, glancing rapidly into the two other rooms on that floor, and seeing them unoccupied, Mr. Grandcourt had gone up to the attic, where Miss Dunne followed him, crying and howling in fear and rage.

The door of the attic room stood open, and the key was on the outside. Mr. Grandcourt and Lottie entered, assured by a glance that it had very recently been the prison of the young girl they sought, for there was her trunk, the lid open, and laces and ribbons well known to Lottie's eyes lying as Maize had left them in a pitiful effort to pass the tedious hours away by arranging and rearranging them. A dainty zephyr shawl that Mr. Grandcourt had often

seen on Maize's shoulders at Silverdale—pink, with floss threads running like shining lights all through it—lay across the foot of the little narrow bed that, coarse though it was, was made as carefully as though it had been Maize's own luxurious couch at Silverdale. A coarse blue dish, on which lay half the slice of bread Miss Dunne had brought up for her prisoner's supper, and a green tumbler containing a portion of water, stood on the chair—a mute, piteous reminder of what these prison hours were to the high-spirited young creature who had been shut in there.

Mr. Grandcourt looked about him, with a curious swelling in his throat.

"And she was shut up in here!" he cried, sternly. "Where is she now?"

"I don't know! She's escaped, her and Sandy together! I'm ruined, dead ruined! Mr. Floyd 'll kill me!" Miss Dunne groaned and lamented.

Unheeding her cries and tears Mr. Grandcourt turned hastily to Lottie.

"We must be off at once! Come, Lottie! You remember the close carriage we passed? It must have been them. We may overtake them yet!"

He hurried down the stairs, followed by Lottie, and just as he was about to open the front door, a low, cautious series of raps sounded on the outside, and he opened—to Lacy Floyd, whose impatience to learn of the safe abduction by Sandy was so great, he had come out to learn the particulars.

The recognition was sudden and mutual.

"Mr. Grandcourt!" Floyd faltered, his face paling to lividness. "You here! What does this mean?"

"You see me here," Grandcourt replied, sternly. "I'll tell you what it means. Just step inside."

As he spoke he seized Floyd's arm and drew him into the hall, closing the door after him.

The amazement of Lacy Floyd at thus finding himself confronted at this place of all others, by Wilton Grandcourt, of all men, was absolutely overpowering. His breath came in gasps, his eyes seemed staring from his head, while Grandcourt eyed him sternly and strangely.

"A most unexpected pleasure, Mr. Grandcourt," Floyd forced himself into saying.

"I question your statement, sir. You ask me why I am here. I answer to rescue Miss Florimel from a loathsome and cruel imprisonment."

Floyd turned a startled, terrified glance at Miss Dunne, for a moment dreading that his schemes had miscarried, and that Maize's lover had indeed come to rescue her.

"I was not to blame, Mr. Floyd! Indeed I was not to blame, sir," Miss Dunne exclaimed, wildly. "It was all Sandy's doings; he stole the key off my very pillar and carried her off!"

A curious relieved look went across Floyd's face. Sandy had not failed him, and by this time they were out on the water—before the morning light came nothing further would be dreaded from the girl.

Grandcourt saw the change of expression on Floyd's face, watching him as he did with such

keenly intent gaze, and he knew that Floyd was not a stranger to the plan of Maize's escape with Sandy; he understood, as if by magic, that Floyd himself had planned the escape, and that Sandy was his hired accomplice to keep Maize closely imprisoned somewhere safer than her recent quarters, and thus compel her to marry Claude Noel.

While these surmises, partly correct, partly incorrect, were occurring to Grandcourt, Lacy Floyd had succeeded in recovering his self-control, and turned toward the young lover in well-assumed quietness of voice and manner.

"No doubt you are surprised at all this, Mr. Grandcourt. I do not know how you learned that my niece was at this house—unless this remarkably astute young servant here informed you—but I shall not deny that Maize has been here, by my authority, as a guardian. She is proud, defiant, headstrong, forgetful that she is no longer the mistress of Silverdale, and defying my authority as she did while in my house, declining my advice, threatening to leave it and go out alone and penniless in the world. I brought her here—and I will justify my cause in any court of law—intending to keep her until she should grow submissive. Heaven knows what it has cost me, for I love the child as though she were my own."

He looked up at Grandcourt with an expression of anguish and grief on his face well calculated to convince of his truthfulness.

"I do not want to hear another syllable of your treacherous softness! I know you, you hypocrite! I have seen Miss Florimel's prison-cell, her prison-fare, and you would dare tell your plausible lies to me. No viler heart beats on this earth than yours, Lacy Floyd! I believe you capable of anything, unless it be actual murder. But I shall outwit you. I will find her, yet!"

Without another word, he swept impetuously past Floyd, amazed and stupefied, Lottie following, pale and alarmed, out to the carriage in waiting.

CHAPTER XI.

SANS MERCIE.

IF but some subtle instinct had warned Maize Florimel that the carriage she passed had contained Wilton Grandcourt and Lottie! But, hearing the approaching wheels she shrunk further back against the cushions, drawing her veil and scarf closer around her face and throat, in nervous dread lest it might be her enemy, Lacy Floyd, on his way to the cottage.

Maize knew no fear, had no doubt of her rescuer—for, had he not been most chivalrous and kind, and had he not voluntarily released her, and was he not taking her to her guardian, Mr. Asher Lyman, at Cape May? And instead of suspecting him, Maize felt a gratitude toward him which already was leading her to plan how best to reward him for his goodness to her. Swiftly the carriage rolled along, and Maize drank in the crisp cool night air as though it had been wine.

After her imprisonment everything looked so wondrously beautiful, even in the starry darkness, and the sound of the wind among the tree-tops, the many noises of the night, were to her

exalted senses the sweetest music she had ever heard.

After a time, and when Maize knew they had been driving through the city streets for some time, the carriage stopped, and Sandy came to the door, lifting his hat courteously.

"We're at the pier, ma'am, where the sloop lays, ready to start, if you'll be so kind as to lose no time getting aboard. I'd like to have had time to 'a' got a woman to go along with you, Miss Florimel—it may be you're afraid to go alone to Cape May with me—"

Maize interrupted him warmly.

"Afraid of you who have rescued me from my terrible imprisonment! Indeed, no, Mr. Dunne! I trust you as I would my brother. You have been too kind to me for me to fear you."

Sandy flushed guiltily, but Maize could not see the blush.

"I thank you, ma'am," he said, quietly, as he assisted her to alight, and then escorted her down the dark, silent pier to the little vessel lying in the dock—just in exact accordance with the directions Sandy had given, when during his day's mysterious absence from the cottage, he had, according to Lacy Floyd's instructions, hired the sloop, and arranged to have it in readiness—as he found it.

It was quick work getting Maize aboard, and in a short time the little vessel was off, and Maize drew a long breath of relief as she felt the motion.

"Afloat! Safe off the land! Thank God," she thought, but so little dreaming what was in the heart of Sandy Dunne as he furtively eyed her, so utterly unconscious that the greatest peril of her life was in store for her.

Weak from her long imprisonment and deprivation of proper food, relieved and hopeful yet somewhat dreary in her thoughts, Maize sat in silence, leaning against the railing of the little boat until, after an hour or so, she fell asleep, the sorrowful face growing peaceful as the slumber deepened. While watching her, Sandy's eyes gleamed sullenly.

"Mr. Lacy Floyd would tell me that now's my chance," he thought. "If I was to keep to my bargain with the old gentleman, now's the time and the opportunity to pitch her overboard. I wonder if I hadn't better? It'd give me a hold on him I wouldn't mind having, but then, he'd have a tighter one on me. You're in my power, my little lady, and I mean to make my fortune out of you. You're not going to Mr. Asher Lyman, nor to Cape May; this very minute we are standing out toward Long Island. Your life's in my hands, and what I shall do, I don't rightly know myself yet."

And poor Maize slept on, while, wide-eyed and busy-brained, Sandy Dunne matured his plans.

On one hand was the reward Lacy Floyd offered him for his ward's destruction—a trivial reward, and considered only because terrible threats lay behind it. On the other hand, if Maize's life was spared, were riches, pleasure, safety—or so Sandy argued. And, before she aroused from that deep, exhausted sleep, he had decided to spare her life in consequence of the

wealth he believed that belonging to the young girl, he could get hold of.

"I'll hide her away, and I'll hide myself away, where old Floyd'll never find me after I've written him a letter saying I have obeyed him."

A little later on, Maize awaked, and Sandy gave her her breakfast, that tasted as never food had tasted to her before—potted salmon, sandwiches, jelly and milk, after which, Sandy engaged her in conversation, gradually directing it in the course he wished, until Lacy Floyd's name was brought in by Maize herself, and then Sandy prepared to deliberately unmask himself.

"The less said of Mr. Lacy Floyd the better," he replied, coolly. "Did you know, Miss Florimel, that it was he who has arranged this sail of yours? It was he who hired me to rescue you from your attic prison, unbeknown to my sister Matilda, to offer to save you—who planned everything—the carriage, the boat; who found the money, and hired me to kill you."

Maize looked at him with burning eyes, a terrible gloom and horror on her blanched face.

"Lacy—wished you to—kill me!" she whispered, piteously, affrightedly.

"Just that, miss. He said it would all turn out just as it has—you would be weary and fall asleep, and I was to lose you overboard, while he pretended to search high and low, and lament loudly over your unknown fate."

A swift light gleamed amid the terrible gloom in her bonny brown eyes, the look of despair suddenly left her lovely mouth, and a heavenly smile gathered around it.

"You obeyed every order—you brought me here—I fell asleep—yet, oh, Mr. Dunne, you did not drown me! You let me live, you have even betrayed Lacy Floyd to me—you pretend to obey him, but you are really befriending me! I dared to doubt you while you were telling me. Oh, Mr. Dunne, you will forgive me!"

She suddenly reached forward and lifted his coarse dirty hand and carried it reverently to her lips, and in confusion he drew it away—confusion and stricken consciousness.

"I'm not as good as you think," he answered hastily. "I'm not bad enough to let you drown before my eyes, Miss Florimel, but, all the same I can't afford to lose by you. I'm a poor man, and I mean to make my fortune out of you."

She drew back suddenly.

"But I am also poor and very friendless. My jewels are all at Lacy Floyd's house—valuable, but out of my reach."

"Is that so?" he responded, coolly. "You have money, though?"

"Only a few dollars in my pocket."

"But you've got a rich lover—that high-toned young Grandcourt fellow?"

"No"—and Maize's sweet face grew deadly pale. "He is poor—poorer than I—for his estate is heavily mortgaged."

"Then there's no way I see at present of your paying me for letting you live, but I'll carry on my little plan, and risk it for awhile, anyhow,

"You're not on your way to Cape May, you know—"

"Not on my way to Cape May! Oh, but you promised—"

Sandy snapped his finger and thumb lightly.

"What's a promise worth? Not that! Besides, you're a gold mine to me—a merchantable commodity—as long as you are in my possession. As long as Lacy Floyd knows you're alive and in my keeping he will be under my thumb, as he never would be if I were his accomplice in your death. I shall make a big thing by keeping you in my possession, and I mean to do it."

He looked steadfastly at her, his mouth closed tightly in grim determination, and poor little Maize, brave though she was, felt her heart sink with awful despair.

It was two or three hours later—hours passed in passionate pleadings on her part at first, then in silent, hopeless submission—that the little vessel entered a narrow cove on the Long Island coast, very near its north-eastern extremity—a lonely, dreary spot, at which Maize looked with wistful, dilated eyes as they drew nearer the shore—a little way back from which, as a curve was rounded, was a forlorn cabin, before which lounged a rough, grizzly-headed old man and woman, who watched in surprise the arrival of the sloop, which Sandy skillfully brought so near the beach that the little row-boat's trip to land was very short.

Maize refused Sandy's assistance, but climbed into the row-boat unaided, and directly stood on shore, a faint gleam of hope in her heart at sight of one of her own sex—old, forlorn, forbidding though she was.

"I suppose you don't recognize me with all this toggery on, Pete," Sandy said to the old man, "but you look as large as life and twice as natural as the last time I saw you and Mrs. Tunison there—"

"It's Sandy Dunne—of course it is," the old woman interrupted, "and that fixed out, I'm sure his own mother wouldn't know him only by his voice! What's up, Sandy? Perlice after ye? Been a-elopin', Sandy?"

Sandy laughed.

"Not much of an elope, Mrs. T. Does she look like it? She's a regular born high-bred one—too aristocratic for me."

"Then what is it?" the old man whispered, significantly, as he shook hands with Sandy.

"A little speculation—I'll tell you all about it by and by. Just at present I want a quiet boarding-place for the young lady—a good, safe room with a lock on the outside of the door. Got the accommodations if you're let into the speculation, Pete?"

"We've got 'em," he replied, and then, grasping Maize's arm, Sandy hurried her across the beach to the wretched little cabin, where she was taken to the smaller of two rooms on the ground floor—dimly lighted, meagerly furnished, fairly clean—and as a struggle would have been folly, Maize wearily submitted while Sandy escorted her in, demanding her money, whatever valuables she had on her person—that it would be out of her power to possibly bribe her jailers, and then, telling her he would see her in a few days, perhaps not so soon, Sandy locked her in,

gave the key to the repulsive old woman, and started back on the little sloop for New York city.

And poor Maize, her high courage at last utterly crushed, gave herself up to the full realization of all the horrors of her position.

CHAPTER XII.

A LOVER'S LUCK.

UPON Mr. Grandcourt's abrupt departure from Miss Dunne's cottage, he and Lottie were driven back to New York with all possible speed, his mind made up to lose not a moment in placing the matter in the hands of a skilled detective, while, having but a short start of him, his hope was strong that a clew would be found.

"The fellow Sandy would take her to some humble isolated spot, the sooner to force her into submission to Lacy Floyd's plans. My first work shall be to inquire at the various railway stations, although it is quite improbable she was taken to any such public place. To-morrow I shall visit the wharves and piers."

Not a moment's time was lost in putting his questions to the test. By mid-afternoon of the day following, two or three hours after Maize's abduction had set out upon his return to the city, Mr. Grandcourt had satisfied himself on the railroad point, while the detective in his employ had undertaken the public and private livery stables, and fallen in with the man who had been paid such a rousing sum of Lacy Floyd's money, through Sandy Dunne, for his midnight work, that he had indulged in an excess of liquor, that made his tongue wag freely and mysteriously; sufficiently however, to warrant the report to Mr. Grandcourt that a clew was discovered which promised fairly.

It was late in the evening when Grandcourt and the officer visited the dingy, lonely little pier to which the carriage had been driven, and there they found the owner of the sloop, his lantern beside him, as he rather impatiently awaited Sandy's return, as agreed.

From him, they learned, with considerable difficulty, that he had hired his boat to a young fellow who had eloped with his sweetheart, which was the story Sandy had given him, but in what direction they had gone, he had no idea.

Baffled at the very threshold of what had promised success, the officer was not discouraged, and at once decided to lie in wait until Sandy's return with the sloop.

"I know the young villain like a book," he said to Grandcourt, "and when he puts in an appearance no disguise can hide him from me."

But—cunning to the last degree, Sandy Dunne did not "put in an appearance." The little vessel came in, after a couple hours' waiting, but not in charge of Sandy, who, having secured the services of a man further up the river, had landed, and sent home the sloop in his care.

"Outwitted beyond question," Grandcourt said, in bitter dismay and disappointment. "What possible step can be taken next?"

"By no means outwitted," the officer returned, as they drove away in their carriage.

"There is good reason to suppose that Sandy

Dunne would take the young lady to some place with which he is well acquainted, and equal reason for knowing it is somewhere not very distant. His confederates and comrades were never many—chief of them being a Pete Tunison who only recently served out his time for a burglary. He's got a cabin down on Long Island—not a bad place to hide a young lady away. Let's follow it up."

As the first train out was not until morning, Mr. Grandcourt returned to his hotel, after seeing Lottie and telling her of their intention, to pass the long hours between fluctuations of hope and fear.

By the first train in the morning they started for the Tunisons' cabin, leaving the train at the nearest station, and being obliged to walk between three and four miles over the lonely dreary roads, every step of which seemed to deepen the conviction that it was to this place Sandy had brought Maize Florimel—that amounted to a feeling of absolute certainty when they came in sight of the wretched little hovel, in front of which the waves washed drearily and monotonously.

Grandcourt's pulses were beating quickly and eagerly as they went up to the cabin, skirting its rear side, and coming round to the wretched little front door that stood open, while within Mrs. Tunison was preparing a mess of fish for their dinner—dropping it with a shriek as the two strangers entered.

"There's no need of making a fuss, old lady," the detective said, suggestively. "You've seen me before, and I know you and the old man through and through. Let me tell you the less trouble you make us the better it'll be for you. Where's the young lady you've got locked up here?"

As he spoke, his hand seizing the old hag's arm, Mr. Grandcourt had gone eagerly to the door leading to Maize's room, the only door except the outer one, and rapped upon it, calling out in passionate eagerness:

"Are you there, Maize? Are you there?"

There followed a second of painful, breathless suspense, and then a swift little rush was heard at the opposite side of the door, a low, inarticulate cry came from within, and then Maize's voice answered, sweet, full of sobs, passionate and incredulous:

"Will! It is not Will—"

The sound of her voice, actually and truly her own beloved voice, burst all the barriers of prudence and restraint on Grandcourt's part. With an exclamation of rapturous delight, he flung himself against the door, wrenching the lock off it, and a delicate, girlish figure fluttered into the outer room, a slim figure with unbound hair, rippling in silky brown waves far below her waist, and great passionate brown eyes lighting up a face white and eager.

And this lovely little girl flew to Grandcourt's arms as a wandering bird flies to its nest.

"Maize! Maize, my darling, thank God!"

All Grandcourt's agitated soul was in his thrilling voice, as he clasped her to his breast.

She laughed almost hysterically, the tears streaming down her thin cheeks.

"Oh, Wilton, I've prayed and longed so for

you to come to me," she said, her tones trembling, her sweet mouth quivering. "Take me away, Will—take me away, please! You don't know what I have undergone since I left Silverdale."

Only a minute of time had been taken for this hasty, eager greeting, and Mrs. Tunison had, the while, been vainly attempting to wrench herself from the strong gripe of the detective's hand, glancing at Grandcourt and Maize with terror and amazement, and uttering several shrill cries, which brought Pete inside, swearing as he entered.

"What the old boy are you yellin' so about, hey? What the devil does this mean?" He stopped point-blank in amazement at the unexpected tableau that presented itself.

"It means that this lady is to be rescued from this place, and we will give you just five minutes to clear the way for her."

Grandcourt looked full in Pete's angry eyes.

"The deuce you will! It'll be all that fellow there's worth to keep the old woman still—he knew that for a truth—and I'll bet I'm a match for you, you fine young man! That 'ere lady is left in my care, and in my care she stays till her garde n's order comes to me."

Grandcourt smiled.

"We'll see all about that. You may have your choice of letting Miss Florimel go peaceably, or you may make all the row you can and then let her go after all."

With a curse, Pete picked up a murderous looking walking-stick that stood behind the door, and rushed at Grandcourt, flourishing it dangerously, while Maize uttered a low, agonized cry.

"Don't be afraid, dear," Grandcourt whispered, swiftly, as he put her from him, and then, suddenly rushing at Pete, with a movement that did credit to his training as an athlete, Grandcourt dexterously knocked the stick aside, sending it spinning to the other side of the room, and before Pete knew what it all meant, he was lying on the floor, stunned, but not hurt, by a blow from Grandcourt's fist.

It was easy work enough then, and in less than five minutes Maize, in sacque and hat, was ready to depart, while old Mrs. Tunison, swearing like a pirate, writhed in the chair to which the officer had tied her.

In all her life, Maize Florimel had never been quite so happy as at that moment, when, with her arm linked through her lover's, she started back to life and joy again.

"It pays me for all," she whispered, looking up in his face. "The future looks dark, but, Will, the brightness of this hour will gild all the gloom it holds. I am saved from bondage and treachery, by you, Will."

"And there shall be no more trouble for you, my darling—never!" he answered passionately. "I have found you, and shall never lose sight of you again. No one will ever harm you more—rest sure of that!"

And the discreet police detective persisted in being a most unwarrantable while in securing the cabin door, so that the two lovers were a distance ahead of him most of the way back to the railway station.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BOLD MOVE.

It may well be surmised that, as they walked along the dreary lonely country road, followed at such thoughtfully discreet distance by the detective, that Mr. Grandcourt and Maize talked very much in lovers' fashion, at least for awhile until the transports of their safe re-union were succeeded by a calm reflectiveness, and then, Maize told all the hideous tale of Lacy Floyd's treachery, the thrilling story of her escape and the revelations Sandy Dunne made to her, narrating the details with an intensity that made Grandcourt listen in breathless wonderment.

"My poor little girl! It has been a fearful experience for you, whose life was so care-free and joyous until this new claimant appeared! And to think you met all these dangers and fears alone, my little darling!"

"But I was neither afraid nor alone, Wilton," she answered, in a low, reverent voice. "He who has promised never to forsake His children was with me, through it all."

Mr. Grandcourt's handsome eyes moistened as he looked on her pale, pure face, and for a moment a sweet, solemn silence reigned.

"It is exceedingly strange that Lacy Floyd supports this Sylvia Florimel's claim to Silverdale, knowing, as he does, that it is a false claim," Mr. Grandcourt said, presently. "What, do you think, is the mystery?"

"I have no idea. It may be that he is to be well paid—it may be a deeper reason. But at all events, he has risked everything on the chances of her success, and he undoubtedly would sacrifice me because he fears I would make trouble."

"And you believe Sylvia Florimel not the true heiress?"

"She is not, Wilton."

"And you are the lawful heiress, Maize?"

"Yes," she said, gravely.

"Then, such being the case, and the brother of the aspirant to the estate and Lacy Floyd being allied against you, even to the extent of seeking your life to further their ends, it follows you are not safe, Maize, nor would you be even with Mr. Lyman. He could have no conception of the treachery of Lacy Floyd, the man who has been his friend for years, from whom one word would outweigh a hundred of yours. My darling, you are in a position of utmost peril."

"Yes, I am; I know that, Wilton," Maize answered, quietly.

"Then there is but one thing to be done," he went on, his voice growing more and more eager with every word. "You are under age, and consequently subject to your guardians, one of whom is a villain, seeking your life; the other the confiding friend of the first.

Darling! if ever you needed a friend, a protector, you need it now! Let me take you at once in my care, dearest. Be my wife immediately—to-day—and Lacy Floyd's authority over you ceases. Be my wife, Maize, my little homeless darling, and you will at least be safe. I will watch you night and day; I will defend you with my life. Say 'Yes' to me, Maize, say 'Yes' to me!"

His handsome face was all aglow as he looked at her with eager, passionate eyes, making it indeed a most difficult task for Maize to refuse such sweet pleading, but all her nature revolted from the idea of a stolen, hurried marriage.

A sorrowful smile came on her lips as she looked at him.

"No, dear, that cannot be. When I marry you it shall be as Maize Florimel should—in my own dear home at Silverdale, by my own pastor, with my friends around me."

"But when may that blessed time come, my darling? We must be separated unless we are married. Your guardians will take you away; you have no home, no available friends. Maize, it must not be as you say! You must go back with me to Grandcourt, my wife, and we will defy your enemies. Maize, dearest, darling, yes!"

"No," she returned, steadfastly; then a swift impetuosity broke into her voice, and he saw a sudden dauntless resolution flash to her eyes.

"The proper place for the heiress of Silverdale is at Silverdale," she said, her eyes shining like stars. "I have thought out my plans, and I am going straight to Silverdale! Claude Noel is still in New York—"

"But his sister is at Silverdale!"

"Yes, but I have no fear of Miss Sylvia Florimel. I shall go home and resume possession of my rights, and from Silverdale I shall telegraph to Mr. Lyman and Mrs. Weston to come to me. I shall take actual possession, and if Mr. Claude Noel wishes to go to law on behalf of his sister, he may. I will not again retire in her favor until forced by the highest law in the land!"

He looked admiringly in her spirited young face.

"It may be you are right, Maize; at any rate we will carry your scheme into effect. We will go direct to Silverdale, and summon your friends, not permitting Claude Noel to cross the threshold again until the law confirms his claims."

"And on our way we will call for Lottie, and take her with us to Silverdale—dear, faithful Lottie!"

The ride to New York was filled with discussions as to their plans; arrived at the city, Mr. Grandcourt conducted Maize to the Westminster Hotel, where, in charge of the detec-

tive, she remained while he brought Lottie to her.

The meeting was most touching between them, and Maize thanked the faithful servant in warmest gratefulness for the great service rendered her.

Attended by her maid, Maize rested that night at the hotel, and the next morning Lottie went on a shopping tour to buy a suitable toilette in which her young mistress might finish her journey.

And at noon, of a crisp, sparkling, late autumn day, the little party took the train for home, reaching the station between four and five, and finding that, as had been the invariable custom during Maize's reign, the Silverdale carriage met the train, for any chance guests that might have arrived.

Mr. Grandcourt at once escorted Maize to the carriage, and when Philip the gray-headed coachman, and Jackson the footman saw Maize, their delight was too genuine to be restrained.

"And it's come home ye have, Miss Maize, God be thanked the day!" Philip said, reverently grasping the dainty little hand she extended to him.

"Yes, home, Philip—it is good, isn't it?" she said, laughing softly. "And how are all things at Silverdale?"

"Jist the same, Miss Maize, bad loock till 'em! Misther Noel he ain't at home, and the lame missis *she* is, and no mistake, and the very auld scratch she is, beggin' yer pardon, Miss Maize."

"Miss Florimel is at the house, then, Philip?"

"Yes'm, an no'm. She's there, but this blissed afthernoon she's out a-roidin' in your pony phaeton, a-dhrivin' Prince Albert like the mischief."

Maize's eyes seemed to flash like diamonds in the sunlight as she turned to Mr. Grandcourt.

"We will take possession without delay, and neither Sylvia Florimel nor Claude Noel shall cross the threshold until the law unlocks the doors! Come, let us lose no time! Drive fast, Philip—fast as the horses can go!"

The little party entered the carriage, and Philip whipped up the great bay horses, his rugged old face excited and his eyes kindling.

As though Fate had eventually veered from its course for her benefit, Maize reached Silverdale before Sylvia Florimel returned from her drive, and the home-coming of the young heiress was a perfect ovation—a scene that brought suspicious moisture to Grandcourt's eyes as he witnessed the devotion of the young girl's servants—a joyful hour indeed for her who so lately had been in such peril.

"I have done well in acting thus boldly," she said to her lover later. "Even if my enemies triumph in the end, I shall feel it was

right for me to make a desperate effort to retain what once was my own."

As she spoke, Lottie came into the room with the announcement that Miss Sylvia Florimel had returned, and was at the door demanding admission in the most indignant manner.

"She cannot enter the house, under any circumstances," Maize quietly said. "The servants understand their orders, and I have no fear of her remaining long outside on the piazza. Her maid is with her—let them drive to the village, or where they will. They cannot enter here."

Nor did Sylvia Florimel enter. Twenty minutes later, she and Isabel her maid, drove off in hot haste, threatening the direst vengeance when they returned, as soon as a police officer could be found.

But Maize only smiled, and bid her lover good-night, assuring him over and over again she had not the slightest fear to be left with only her servants.

His solicitude, however, was not so easily removed, and it was not until an hour later, when Mrs. Weston arrived, in hot, eager haste, that he consented to return to Grandcourt, while the two ladies, in their rapturous reunion, spent the hours far into the morning in confidential conversation.

CHAPTER XIV.

BAFFLED!

As is already known to the reader, Sandy Dunne had cunningly returned the hired sloop to its owner by a third party, while he, himself, discreetly kept well out of sight.

Arrived at the city, he resolved to go at once to his sister's cottage, there to await the coming of Lacy Floyd with the promised reward.

Anxious, nervous, Lacy Floyd was not behindhand with his appointment, but at sight of Sandy, tranquil as a summer morning, his worried countenance lightened.

"Ah! Back already?" he demanded, as, shown into the shabby little parlor by Miss Dunne, who did not hesitate to show how incensed she was at the mysterious conference from which she was so ruthlessly shut out, he locked the door, and went close up to Sandy, his voice falling to a hoarse whisper:

"Well, man, well? How has your trip turned out?"

"A 1! Just as I meant it should."

"Then—then—" and Floyd's whisper changed to a sort of eager gasp—"she is—dead?"

Sandy nodded assent, and at the same instant Floyd suddenly sunk down on the nearest chair, his face ghastly to lividness, his eyes weird and dilated.

"Dead! Drowned! Poor little girl! Dead! My God!"

Sandy stared at him in utter amazement, for such emotion from such a source, at such a time, seemed to him little less than imbecile.

"What's the matter with you, Mr. Floyd?" he said, angrily. "You paid me to kill her, and now—"

Floyd shuddered.

"I do not regret it, but the awfulness of it comes home to me none the less. She trusted me, and I betrayed her to her death. But I regret nothing. It is well done. Here is your reward."

He gave Sandy a thick roll of bills, which he counted before he put safely in his pocket.

"It is just what I engaged to give you," Floyd said, "and it settles matters between us. I owe you nothing—you owe me nothing."

Sandy smiled curiously.

"You're right, sir. We're square."

"But before we part company forever, I want to ask you some questions—about poor Maize. You were entirely alone with her on the vessel?"

"Stark stone alone."

"And—when she slept, you—tossed her overboard?"

"No. I waited until she woke up. She knew what was coming. I told her the whole hideous story, that I was a villain not to be matched this side of perdition, and that you hired me to kill her—"

Floyd interrupted Sandy's cool recital with a subdued yell.

"You did not send her into eternity with that damning knowledge?"

"I told her everything, but beyond her horror and terror was the knowledge that 'Lacy' could so serve her."

The cold sweat stood on Floyd's forehead, like huge rain-drops.

"You were mad, cruel, to tell her, and yet it makes no special difference—now. That is all I want of you, Sandy," and his voice grew hard and cold again. "I am through with you, now and forever. Our acquaintance ends here, to-night—you go your way, I go mine. But I give you fair warning that the police are on your track, and you had better get out of the country at once."

"I will," Sandy answered. "Let me ask you a question first, though. Does the new heiress of Silverdale live at Silverdale?"

"She does."

"Do you think I could get a position there? The police would never think of looking for me there. Say as steward, or head butler, or—"

"You! What presumption. You Miss Florimel's steward or butler?"

"She had better make me either than her enemy," Sandy returned, with a suggestive smile. "Let me tell you a little secret, Mr. Floyd. In return for my confidence to Miss

Maize, she told me all that she heard between you and Mr. Noel in your library, about the flaw in the new claim!"

Floyd started, then laughed uneasily.

"Girl's nonsense—jabber," he said. "Don't play with fire, Sandy—it'll burn you. Even if she heard it, and told you it, what does such testimony amount to? And remember"—and his eyes flashed uglily—"you cannot blackmail me through anything Maize Florimel told you. I'd see you hung high as Haman for her murder first!"

"Don't get up on too high a horse, Mr. Floyd!" Sandy retorted, with menacing anger. "'Hang' is a mean word, and I haven't said the girl was dead yet!"

Floyd jumped to his feet, springing at Sandy in tigerish passion.

"Not dead!" he gasped. "Is she not dead?"

"No, she's not," Sandy sneered, defiantly, and Floyd shrunk, shivering back as though a terrible blow had been dealt him.

"Not dead! And you exchanged all those confidences with her! Not dead! Alive—yet!"

"Exactly. Not dead, alive yet, and securely hidden among old pals of mine where neither you nor the law can find her."

"Hidden—with—pals of yours! Great God! Grandcourt was here the night you went away, demanding your whereabouts, and, only this morning he was seen in company with a noted detective, who was making inquiries about the Tunisons—those old cronies of yours, on the Long Island shore. Is it at Tunison's you left her?"

Sandy uttered a sharp cry—like that of a wild beast cheated of its prey, and the exclamation, the look, the raging fury all told the truth.

For a second the two villains glanced at each other.

"The game is up," Sandy muttered, thickly. "She is free by this time!"

"Free—with the infernal information you gave her! Free! but her freedom must not last; her—"

A quick, cautious rap on the outer door interrupted Floyd, and a pallor of apprehensive fear swiftly whitened both the rogues' faces—for a second only, and then Miss Dunne ushered in—Claude Noel, agitated and alarmed.

"I have important news," he said, without preface of greeting or courtesy. "A telegram reached me shortly ago from my sister, saying that while she was out for a drive this afternoon, Maize Florimel returned to Silverdale and took possession, refusing to allow her to enter the house. My sister is at a hotel, in a state of great excitement, and summons me to her by the first train."

Floyd stood stupefied at the news.

"Maize at Silverdale! What a cursed fa-

talities! 'Possession is nine points of the law, and she means to force you to appeal to the law. Affairs have taken an alarming turn.'

"What are we to do?" Noel asked anxiously.

"Do? Proceed to extremities!" Floyd exclaimed, his eyes blazing evilly. "We will go direct to Silverdale, you and I, and—once there, it will go hard with me if by strategy and force we do not win the day."

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER THE STORM.

It was between three and four o'clock of the day following Maize's triumphal strategic return to Silverdale, and the arrangement that had been made by Lacy Floyd and Claude Noel, that the announcement was made to Maize that a party of guests were at the gates, which had by her order been closed and fastened, demanding admission.

"It's not so very large a party, ma'am," the porter at the lodge said, "but it's quite the strangest lot I ever see. Miss Sylvia's at the head of 'em, ma'am, sitting in her carriage mad as a fluke. Mr. Noel's along with her, swearing and threatening, and Mr. Floyd and Mr. Braddon, ma'am, and Mr. Lyman, and a rough—"

Maize caught eagerly at the name of her guardian.

"Mr. Lyman has arrived? I am most anxious to see him."

"And it's anxious he is to see you, ma'am, for he bid me say to you: 'Tell Miss Maize this ridiculous farce must proceed no further. Tell her,' says he, 'that I come as her guardian, in the name of the law she defies, to command her to unlock the gates, and yield the premises to its legal owner,' says he, ma'am."

Maize flushed haughtily as she turned toward Mrs. Weston.

"If I might only have a private interview with Mr. Lyman," she said. "But once the gates are opened, my enemies would rush in upon me. What can I do?"

"Go down to the gates and have a parley with the people through the bars. I will go with you, and you can take Mr. Lyman aside. Let a couple of the men-servants accompany us."

This seeming a proper course and the only available one, Maize at once ordered the carriage, and very shortly the little defensive party were at the scene of action.

And a curious scene of action it was. Outside, the party, as the porter had described it, Sylvia Florimel in a high state of nervous excitement, and Claude Noel furious with rage, swearing and cursing at the under lodge-keeper for daring to refuse to admit them, while, in his usual role of amiable peacemaker,

Lacy Floyd was striving to pacify and calm his clients.

Mr. Lyman and Mr. Braddon stood apart, in earnest conversation, and as Maize stepped from her carriage and went directly toward him, she saw how indignant, angry and annoyed he looked. In return to her bow of greeting, he inclined his head coldly, and without a preliminary word, broke harshly out:

"What does all this absurd masquerading mean, Maize? You voluntarily retired from the Silverdale estate, to give place to its legal owner, and here you are back again, usurping Miss Florimel's rights, creeping into her house during her absence—conduct more becoming a thief, an adventuress, than a lady. I am shocked, mortified at your unaccountable behavior."

Maize's brown eyes flashed and her cheeks reddened.

"You have heard but one side of the story, Mr. Lyman," she began, with rare, sweet patience, but he interrupted her sneeringly:

"I know all I wish to know—and that is that your conduct is illegal, unladylike, absurd. As your guardian, I command you to open the gates!"

"And as your ward I decline, most positively, to open the gates, unless I have your guarantee that you will enter alone."

Her answer was firm, resolute, her face bright and glowing, her eyes like twin lamps as she looked at Mr. Lyman.

"Do you dare dictate terms to me? When I enter, the heiress of Silverdale and her friends enter with me."

Maize laughed—a saucy, defiant laugh.

"As the heiress of Silverdale and her friends are already within, I do not see but that you will be obliged to go back where you came from," she answered coolly. "The ownership of Silverdale shall be settled by law—until it is settled, I remain in possession, undismayed by threats, undisturbed by sieges at my gates. My dear guardian, I wish I might explain the matter freely to you. That girl yonder, Sylvia Florimel by name, is *not* the rightful heiress, well though the proofs look. I solemnly assure you, Mr. Lyman, I overheard Lacy Floyd tell Claude Noel there was a flaw in the claims, known only to himself, in virtue of which her claims are neither legal nor moral."

Mr. Lyman looked in amazement at Floyd, who came forward, surprise and grief and pain on his face.

"It is the most remarkable statement I ever heard," he said, as if overwhelmed with bewilderment. "My dear child, you must be dream—"

"Not a word to me, Lacy Floyd!" she commanded, imperiously, her eyes glowing with scorching contempt. "Hypocrite that you

are, you know I speak the truth! You know how you took me a prisoner from your house and shut me up in the garret-chamber, from which you hired Sandy Dunne to kill me—"

Floyd uttered an exclamation and held up his hands in piteous horror, while Mr. Lyman cried out in angry impatience:

"Hush such outrageous accusations, Maize! Who do you suppose believes such hideous falsehoods—it is of a piece with the rest of your melodramatic conduct in placing us in the position of besiegers of your house and home. You should have devised a more skillful story if you really wished to impose upon people with a fair share of common sense."

"Let the accusations go for what they are worth," Noel cried, angrily. "What I want is, that my sister gets inside her own gates. I don't want any trouble if I can help it, but I don't mean to have other people living in my house, keeping me out of my own, as well as putting me to inconvenience."

"You are right, Mr. Noel," Mr. Lyman answered. "Maize, again I command you to unlock these gates."

"And again I decline! As you doubt my word, and insult me by your doubts, I will bring this interview to an end. As there is nothing more to say, but to bid Mr. Claude Noel seek the redress he wants for his sister at law, I will wish you good-afternoon."

With a sweeping little bow of icy hauteur, she returned to the carriage, and was driven back to the house, leaving the party outside engaged in an animated discussion.

"If it were possible to climb the gates, I believe I would do it," Mr. Lyman said, vexedly.

"We must get in by stratagem. Once in possession, we could make our own terms with her," Noel declared.

"The wretched, misguided girl! We must enter by one means or another," Floyd said, gloomily, as though Maize's accusations had crushed him to the very earth. "I fear her troubles have unbalanced her mind, and unless we protect her, her name will become a scandal through the country."

"Once on the premises and I will take her away with me—abroad, anywhere, until she recovers her usual good sense and delicacy. For the present, our best plan is to quietly withdraw, sending word by the porter to Maize that we will seek the legal redress she counsels, and then, advise together by what strategic move we will gain entrance."

Mr. Lyman's plan being considered advisable, his instructions were carried out, and in silent rage Sylvia Florimel and Claude Noel consented to drive back to the village.

An hour later, just before the dusk of the October day began to gather, their plans all

arranged, they started forth again—not to the gates to force admission, but, to the river, which was the dividing line on one side the Silverdale estate, by which they meant to secretly gain access to the grounds, steal up to the various entrances of the mansion, and thus gain personal possession. Arrived at the river's edge, Noel looked about for the two boats he had ordered in readiness for his party, and to his anger and amazement saw that one of them was in the very act of being unloosed from its moorings—by a man who was suddenly paralyzed with fear to hear Noel shout at him:

"Hello there! Drop it! We've got you, you rascal! Lyman! Floyd! Come along quick!"

Sandy Dunne heard the names—Lyman, one of the guardians, Floyd, the man in whose power he was to a certain extent—Sandy Dunne, who had stolen down to Silverdale behind Floyd and Noel, anxious to know, for his own sake how the affair was to terminate.

And, hearing what he heard, excited, terrified, believing that retributive justice was at hand, believing that the sly, artful Floyd had in some way healed the breach between himself and the young girl, and that upon his own unlucky head the weight would fall, either for what he had done, taking Maize to the Tunisons' cabin, or because Floyd had, in spite, set the police on his track—in view of all this, Sandy believed himself betrayed, lost!

With a snarl of rage, he turned on Noel.

"You needn't call them—I'll never be taken alive!"

Visions of Sing Sing and Auburn were flying like demons through his brain as he drew his pistol from his pocket; the sight of which failed to intimidate Noel, who was so eagerly bent upon securing the boat to get over to Silverdale.

"Get out of the boat—d'ye hear? Surrender!"

They were the last words Claude Noel ever spoke, for, as he dashed toward Sandy, Sandy fired, the shot crashing through his brain with sickening aim, and he fell prostrate on the little wharf, just as the rest of the party came up, horrified, excited. And Sandy, livid with the awful fear of what was his sure doom now, with human blood on his hands, saw them rush up, saw Sylvia Florimel fall back in her seat with a shriek of awful horror, and then he put the still smoking weapon to his own temple—and fired, an awful smile on his face as he fell forward in the bottom of the boat.

But the horrors of the scene were not yet over, for when Lacy Floyd rushed forward to catch Sylvia Florimel as she reeled and fell, it was to find that the terrible shock had been more than she could bear, and the nervous ex-

citement under which she had been for days had paved the way for the swift apoplectic stroke which did its work so unerringly.

Mr. Lyman, appalled and unnerved, surveyed the dreadful scene.

"My God!" he cried. "Two people lying dead at our feet and Miss Florimel dying! What are we to do?"

"There is but one thing to do," Mr. Braddon answered promptly. "We must get Miss Florimel to Silverdale without the loss of a moment's time. There is no question but that we will be admitted under the circumstances. Leave the coachman in charge of the dead bodies until some one returns; our first duty is to the living."

Being the only cool one in the party, he was implicitly obeyed, and under his management Sylvia was at once rowed over to the other side, where their coming had been made known to Maize and Mrs. Weston, who, with Mr. Grandcourt, and two or three men-servants, were on the Silverdale side, awaiting their coming, and prepared to prevent a landing.

But before they had reached the shore, Mr. Braddon had shouted out the true condition of affairs, and begged Maize's mercy on behalf of the dying girl—an appeal that was not lost, when Mr. Grandcourt had satisfied himself it was not a ruse to obtain a foothold.

In solemn procession they carried the dying woman to her own room, where all human means were applied, but in vain, and when in a fierce rebellion that had not manifested itself before, and which struck every one with strange amazement, Lacy Floyd declared she should not die.

"Who says Sylvia is dying? I tell you she shall not die!"

As he spoke, he looked in sullen defiance around as the little group gathered about the dying bed, but there was no answering look of aught but sorrowing sympathy for his genuine grief.

"No human help can save her," Maize said, softly. "She is passing away now—God have mercy on her soul."

And then with a cry no one of them ever thought could have come from Lacy Floyd's mouth, a cry they never forgot, he fell on his knees at the bedside, and lifted the cold, limp hand to his lips, kissing it passionately.

"Sylvia! Sylvia, come back to me—come back and I'll tell you what you so often pleaded to know! I have done it all because I loved you, I wanted to see you rich, and honored! Couldn't you guess, dear, how it was? that you are not Royal's child, born of that mad marriage of his—but mine—mine—Sylvia, you are my own child, and I would have sold my soul for your sake!"

Almost paralyzed with horrified amazement, the listeners around that death-bed heard the unconscious confession from Lacy Floyd's lips, as, in pitiful abasement and abandon he talked into the ear that heeded not; and when, a while after, kindly hands took him away, they knew his mind had received a terrible shock, a shock from which he never recovered fully, but spent the rest of his life a harmless, brooding creature, a recipient of Maize Florimel's abounding charity, in the private asylum to which he was taken.

The next day after the tragedies occurred, Claude Noel and his half-sister were taken away to their old home, from which they were buried, while Sandy Dunne was sent home to his sister and Mrs. Duncan, from whom, as soon as possible, lawyer Braddon heard in detail the story of Lacy Floyd's marriage to Gracieuse Noel, the birth of Sylvia, and the scheme that had been concocted to represent Royal Florimel as the chief actor instead of Lacy Floyd.

Mr. Asher Lyman remained some days at Silverdale, to apologize to Maize for his harsh doubts of her; and so genuine was his sorrow that Maize found it no difficult matter to freely forgive him, and to enable him to feel it was all to be forgotten.

Early in the next spring there was a grand wedding at Silverdale, and Mr. and Mrs. Wilton Grandcourt went abroad for a year's tour, to find upon their return that not only was Silverdale in a condition of splendid renovation and decoration, but that Grandcourt, too, was entirely restored to its old time grandeur and elegance—Maize's wedding present to the man she loved so well.

And so, after all the gloom and treachery that darkened a brief time in her young life, Maize emerged into the full shining of the sun of love, and trust, and joy.

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